



REAPER SCANS

TITAN



NOVEL BY PONDMAN

HUNTER ACADEMY'S BATTLE GOD

Hunter Academy's Battle God

– 헌터 아카데미의 최강 투신 –

- VOLUME 1 -

-AUTHOR-

Pond Man

연못맨

[Reaper Scans]

– STORY –

With an F-rank Trait, deemed the worst of the worst, 5-year old Shin Yu-sung is abandoned by the Shin-oh family, which is famous for raising hunters.

The same year, he meets one of the strongest hunters, the Fist King, at the orphanage and is adopted by him.

The Fist King became the strongest not through his Trait or special abilities — but by training his body.

He takes note of Shin Yu-sung's physique instead of his Trait—

Nine blocked yin pathways.

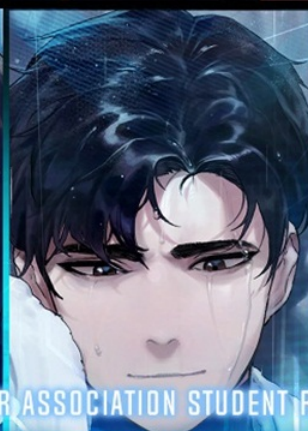
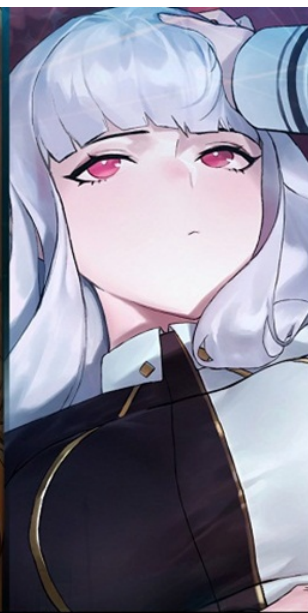
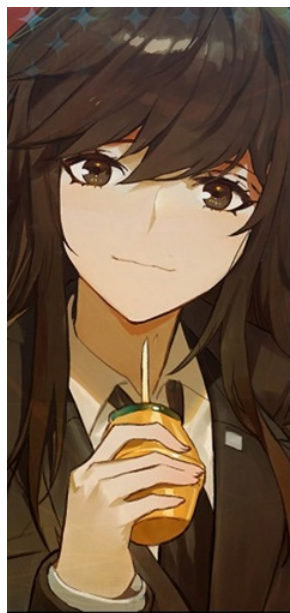
“Your blocked pathways cause your body's mana to overflow, giving you an exceptional mind and god-like looks! But you also pass away before coming of age...”

An abundance of bodily yang.

“Your body is overflowing with the energy that can cure your nine blocked yin pathways!”

– GENRE –

Action Adventure Comedy Fantasy Harem
Martial Arts Romance School Life



HUNTER ASSOCIATION STUDENT REGISTRY

HUNTER ACADEMY'S BATTLE GOD



"BANANA-FLAVORED MILK...
IS DELICIOUS."

TRAIT: HEIGHTENED FOCUS
SHIN YU-SUNG

"HOW DULL..."

TRAIT: CRYOKINESIS

ADELA



"TH-S-SORRY!"

TRAIT: BLACK MAGIC
SUMIRE 





"LIÚ MÍNG..."

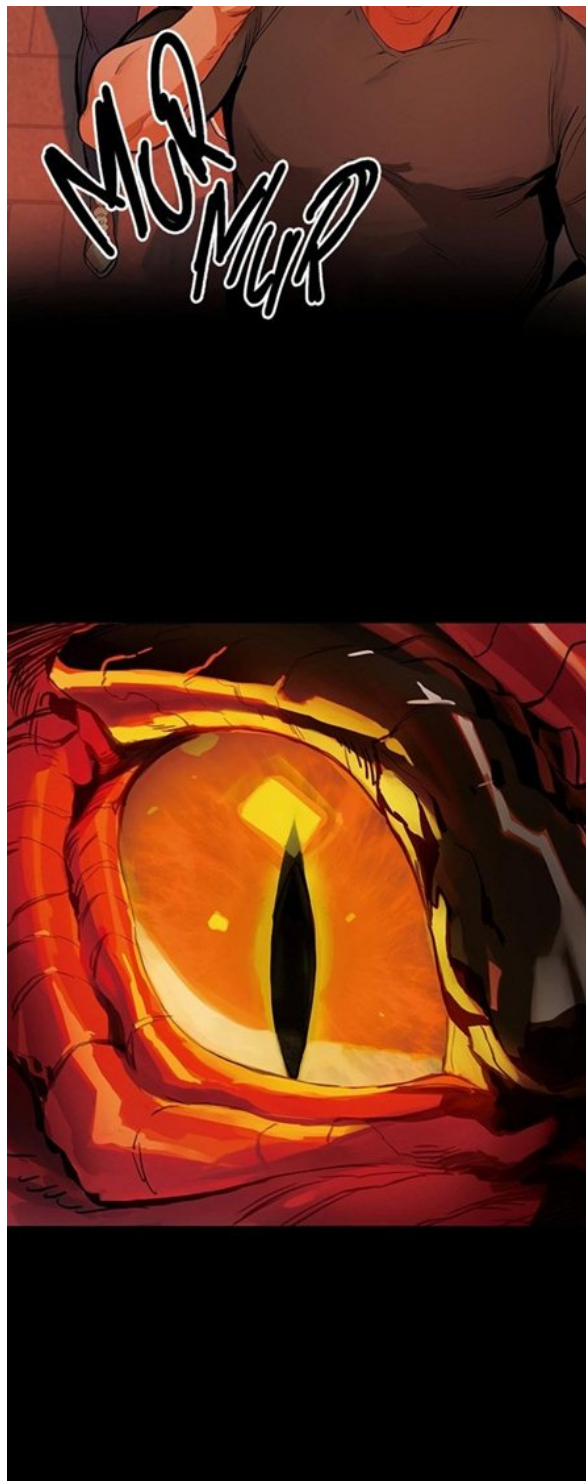
TRAIT: ACCELERATION

LIÚ Jùn

Chapter 0

TL: QUICK REMINDER, THIS IS A PROMO CHAPTER. IT'S NOT A MANHWA YET. IT'S A NOVEL

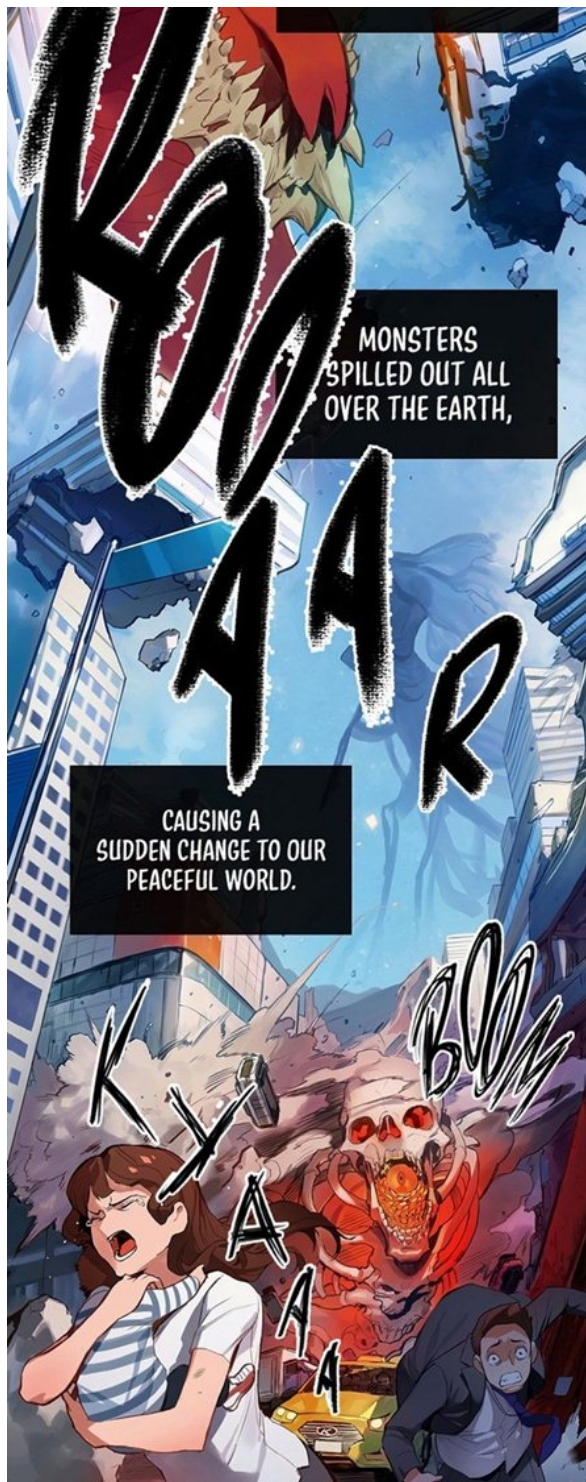




OUTBREAK

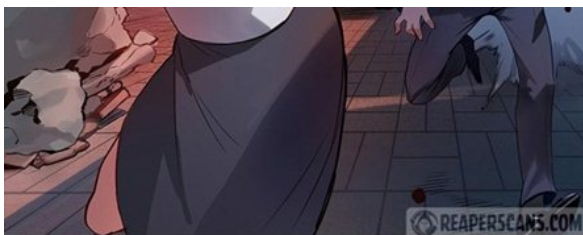


ONE DAY, A HOLE
OPENED UP IN THE SKY,
AND CALAMITY BEFELL
HUMANITY.



MONSTERS
SPILLED OUT ALL
OVER THE EARTH,

CAUSING A
SUDDEN CHANGE TO OUR
PEACEFUL WORLD.



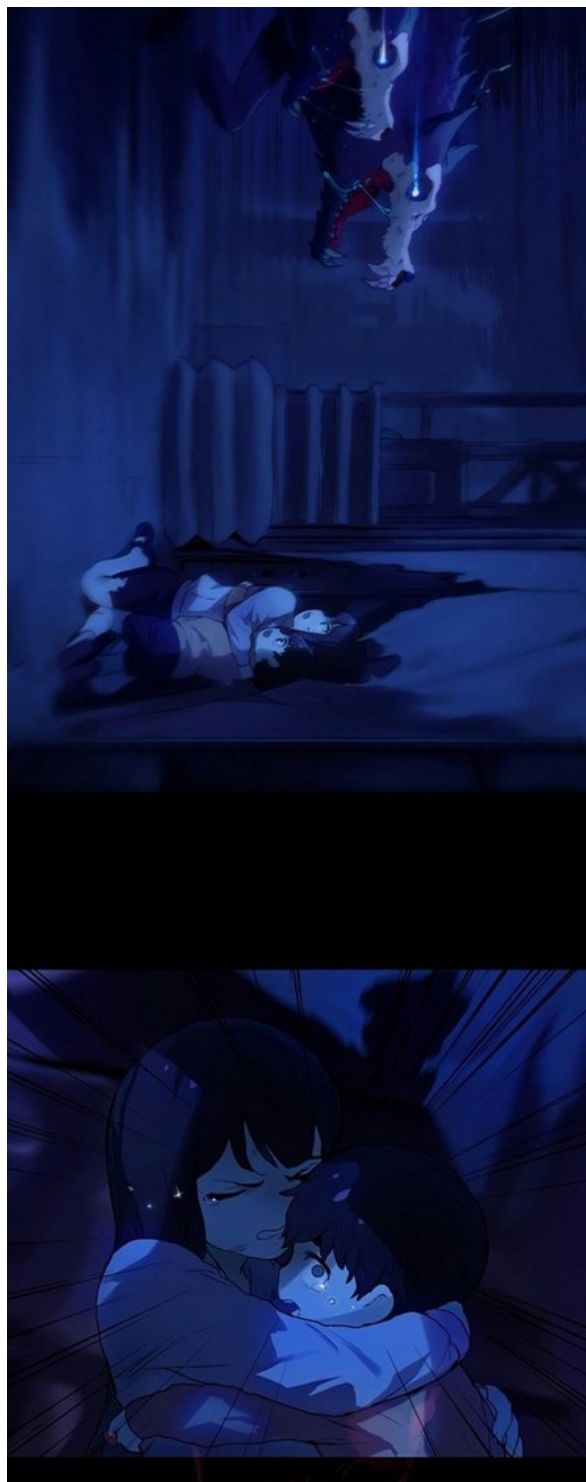
CITIES SLOWLY
TURNED TO *RUBBLE*





AND MANKIND *DESPAIED.*







HOWEVER,



WOOOOM

FIST
KING

THIS WAS
NOT THE END FOR
HUMANITY.

WINE



HUNTERS

HUMANS THAT
WERE GIVEN SPECIAL
ABILITIES

WERE NAMED

<HUNTERS> AND
BECAME THE HOPE
OF MANKIND.



THIS WAS THE
BLESSING BESTOWED
UPON HUNTERS—

SCRATCH

SCRATCH

SCRATCH

TRAITS.

SCRATCH





IT WAS
ALL DUE TO
TRAITS.

YES,
THAT DAMN
BLESSING...

GRINA







HUM...



...AND THAT
IS WHY,

I BROUGHT YOU
HERE FROM THE
ORPHANAGE...



YOU WERE
BORN WITH THE
PERFECT
BODY.





FIRST...

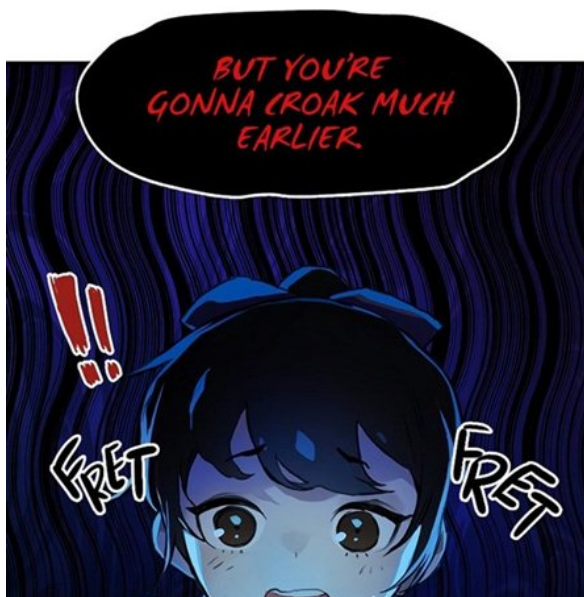
**THE NINE BLOCKED
YIN PATHWAYS!**



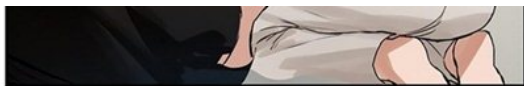


BEING BORN WITH
THE NINE BLOCKED YIN
PATHWAYS MEANS—!







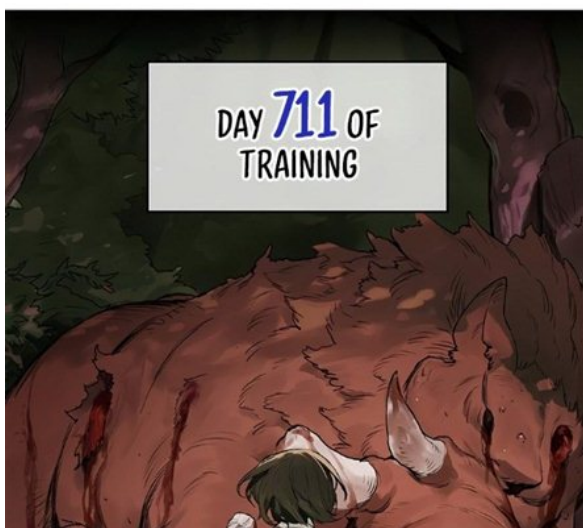




YOUR PHYSIQUE IS
THE KIND OF TALENT
THAT WILL NEVER AGAIN
APPEAR IN HUMAN

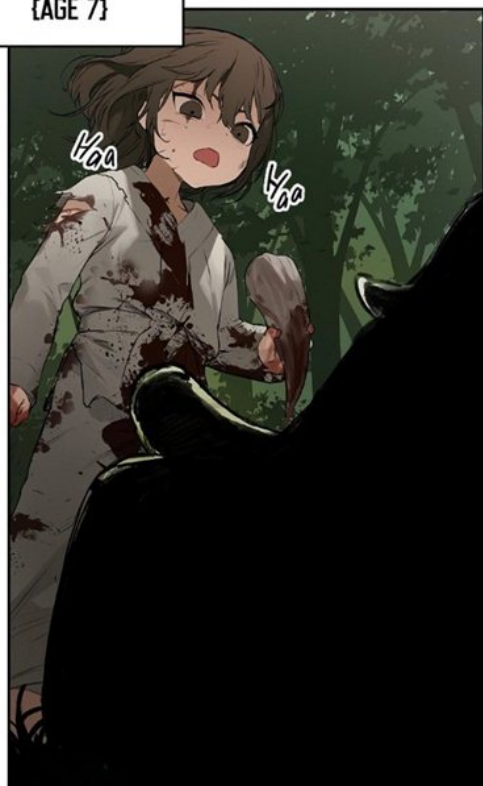








SHIN YU-SUNG
{AGE 7}



TUT-TUT...





MY RIVAL, THE SWORD
GOD, DEFEATED A RANK 2
MONSTER WHEN THEY WERE
SEVEN YEARS OLD!

YOU WERE BORN WITH A
MUCH GREATER PHYSIQUE,
YET THAT'S ALL THAT
YOU CAN DO?



DEVOTE
YOURSELF
MORE TO YOUR
TRAINING.

Show me where
you got hurt, too.

OKAY!

LET'S PREPARE
WHAT YOU CAUGHT
FOR DINNER.



DAY 1040 OF
TRAINING

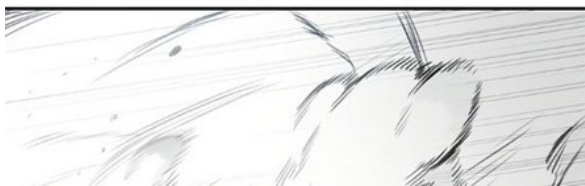
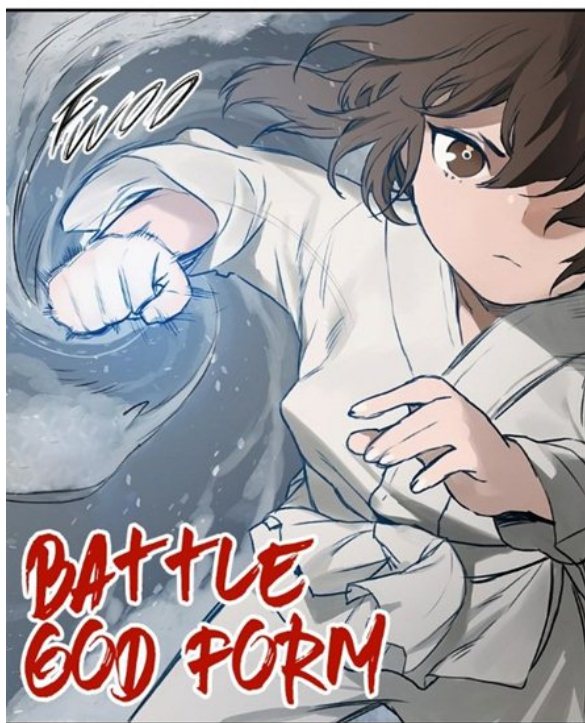
I DID IT!!!

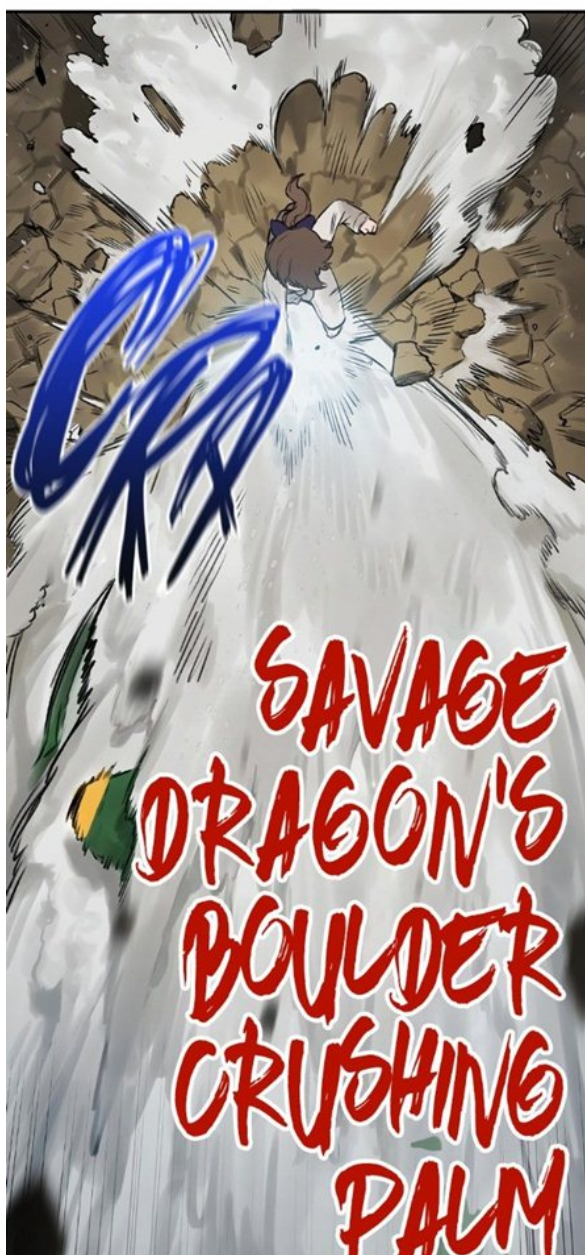
SHIN YU-SUNG
{AGE 8}

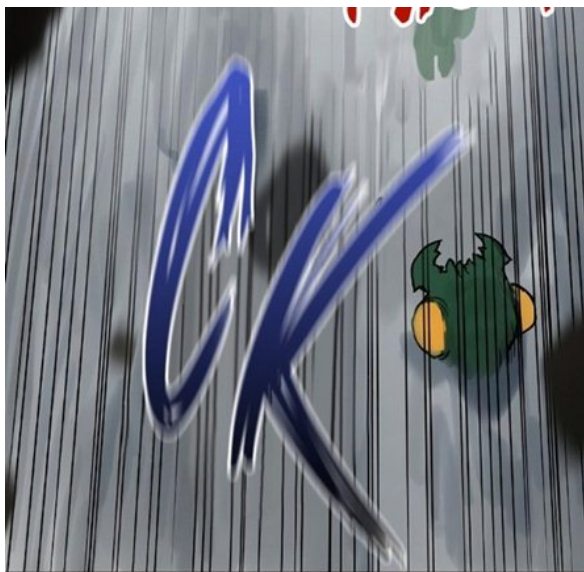


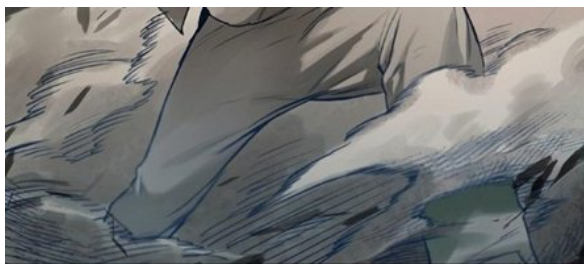
DAY 1785 OF
TRAINING













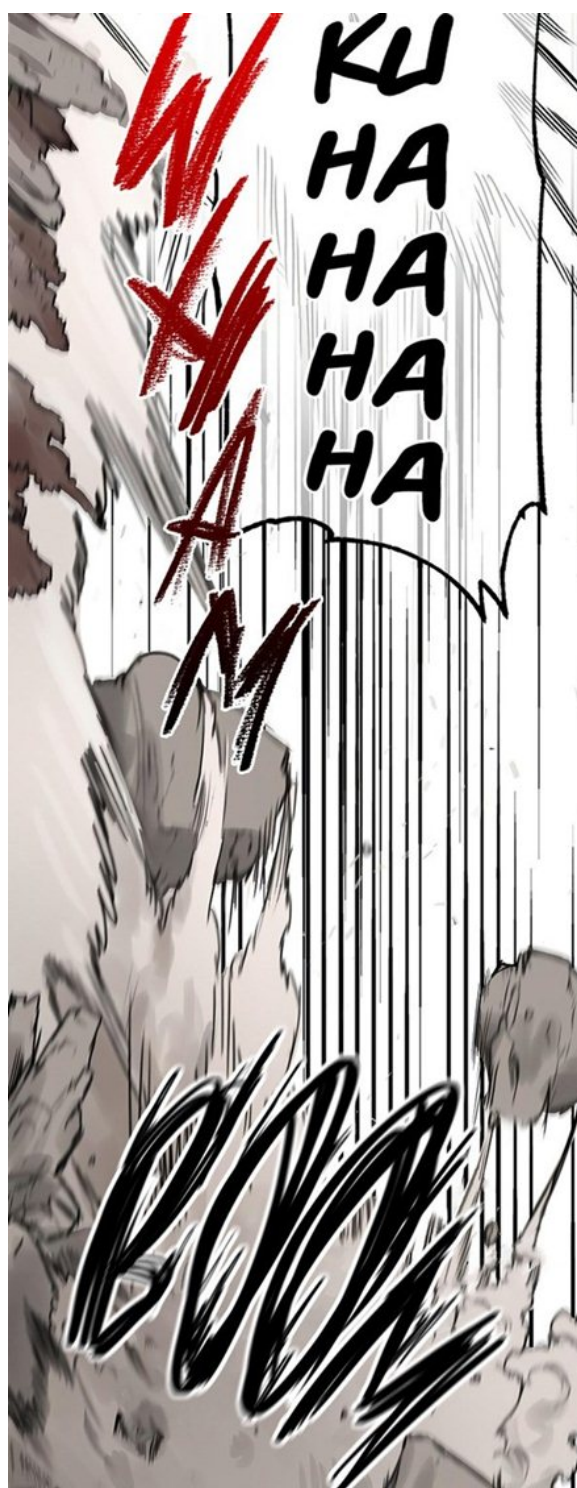
DAY 2892 OF
TRAINING

SHIN YU-SUNG
{AGE 13}



















FWOOSH

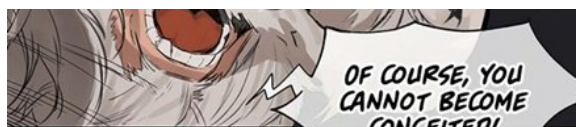


КУНАНАНАНА!









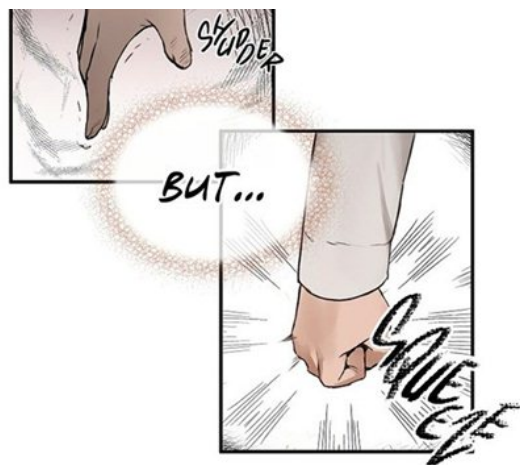
OF COURSE, YOU
CANNOT BECOME
CONCEITED!

THERE ARE PLENTY OF HUNTERS
OUT THERE WHO MATCH ME IN SKILL
LEVEL! NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH
HOW STRONG YOU ARE!

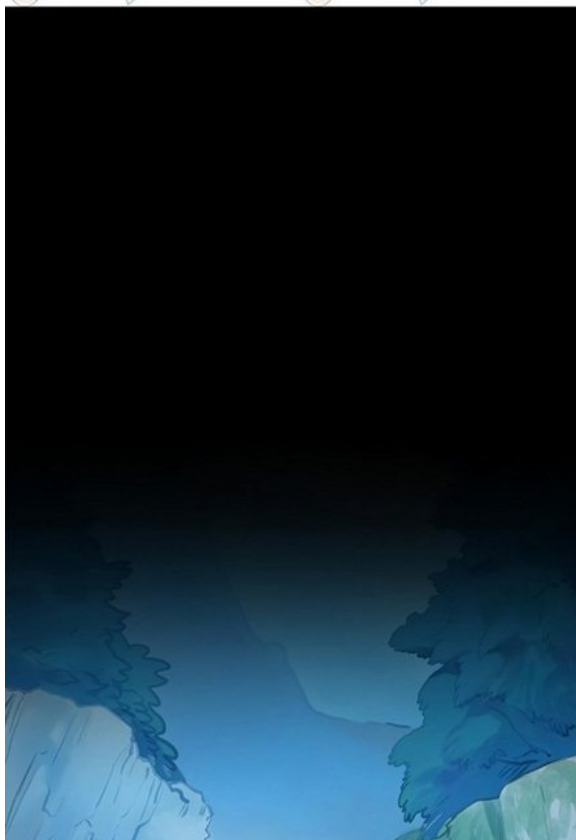
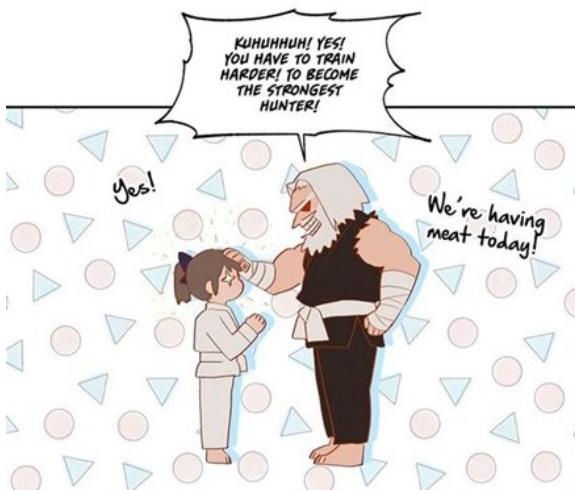


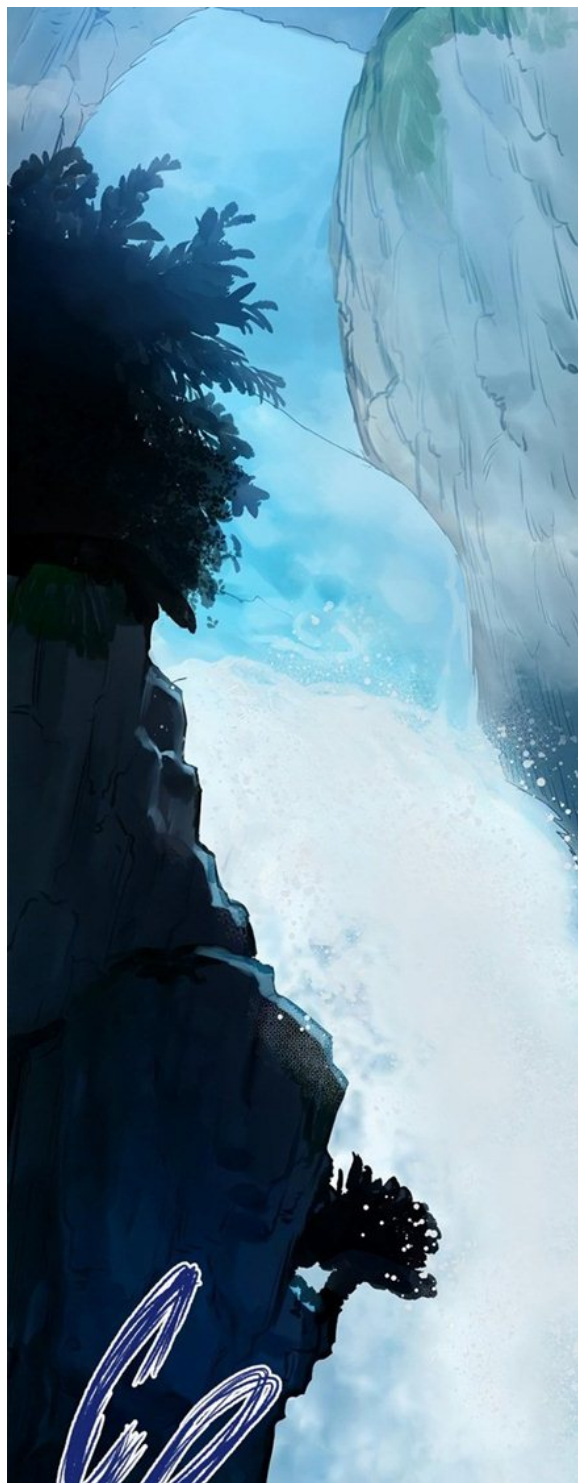
WHEN I LEAVE
THE MARTIAL SPIRITS'
MOUNTAIN...





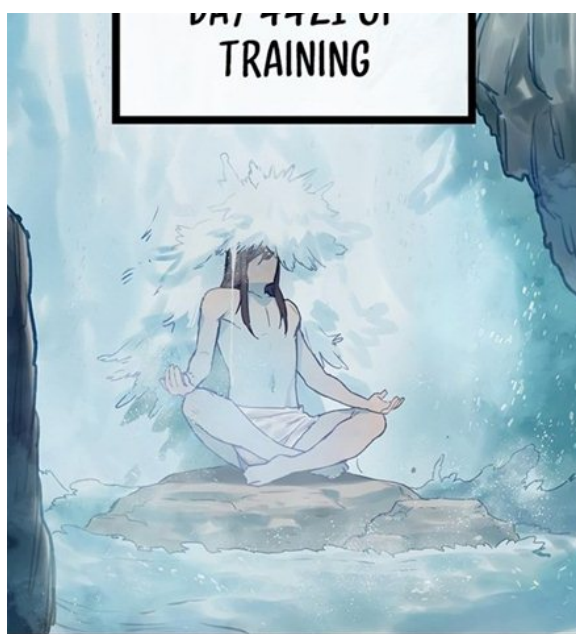


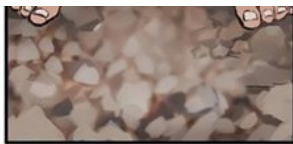


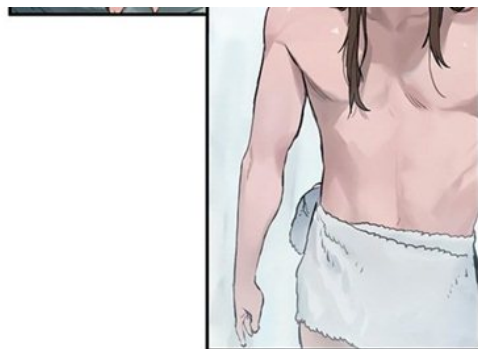




DAY 1121 OF



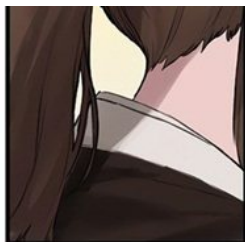


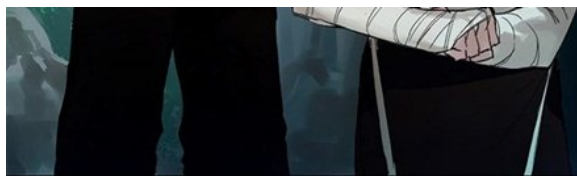


SHIN YU-SUNG
{AGE 17}













GAON...
ACADEMY...?



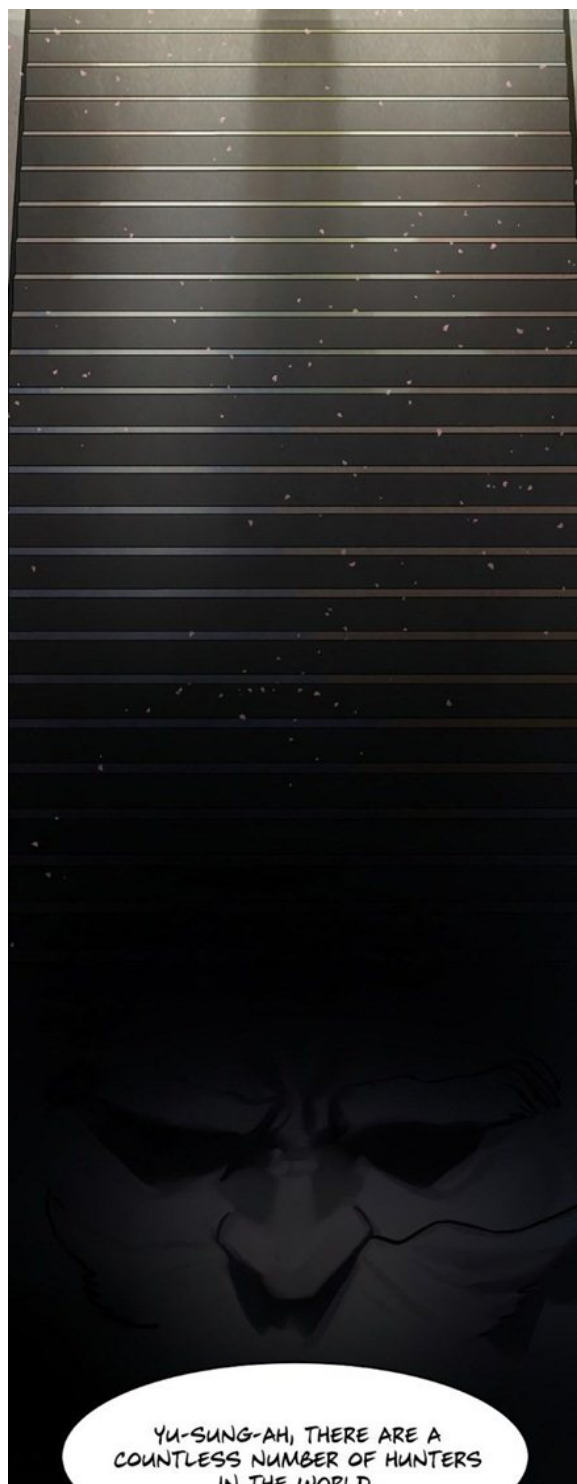
I ALREADY
DROPPED OFF THE
LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION.
IT'S YOUR FIRST TIME LEAVING
THIS PLACE IN 12 YEARS,
ISN'T IT?

...THANK YOU FOR
EVERYTHING UP UNTIL
NOW, MASTER.









YU-SUNG-AH, THERE ARE A
COUNTLESS NUMBER OF HUNTERS
IN THE WORLD







SWI H



AND EXPERIENCE
MANY THINGS.



BUT,



YOU WILL BECOME
THE STRONGEST OF
THEM ALL.





YOU ARE
THE DISCIPLE THAT I,
THE STRONGEST HUNTER
IN THE WORLD, HAVE
RAISED...



HUNTER ACADEMY'S BATTLE GOD



원 작 | 연못맨 웹 톤 | Gasari

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Chapter 1

Our peaceful world changed after the Outbreak released monsters into it.

All sorts of unthinkable foes like dungeons, gates, towers, monsters, and others threatened all of mankind and birthed many casualties.

Of course, that didn't mean that this was the end of humanity. Humans were given special powers.

"That's what they call Traits, blessings given to hunters. However!"

With a fire lit in his eyes, Yu WonHak—a master with white hair—spit out his words and hit the ground with his fist.

Ccrraacckk!

The ground split with the tremors Yu WonHak's punch created. Baring his yellowed teeth, he grinned at the mere five-year-old Shin YuSung with a scary expression.

"Hunters these days are hopeless! They screw around by relying on those Traits and then die off in dungeons!"

Gulp.

Shin YuSung kept his mouth shut and nodded in lieu of an answer. Seeing the expression on his face, Yu WonHak gave a pleased smile.

"And what does a hunter need to not die a gruesome death in a dungeon?"

At the Fist King Yu WonHak's question, the only five years old Shin YuSung hurriedly scoured his head for a response, then carefully raised his hand.

“Strength?”

“K-kuhahaha!”

Yu WonHak laughed like a maniac at Shin YuSung’s response, then lifted him up.

“Yes, strength! A hunter should rely solely on their body! Traditionally, a hunter should use their overwhelming strength to crack open the opponent with one punch, whether it’s a villain or a monster!”

He placed Shin YuSung on the ground and continued talking with a cool voice.

“That’s why I brought you here from the orphanage—because you were born with the perfect body.”

Yu WonHak’s words were right. Shin YuSung had an innate constitution that was blessed by the gods.

First was the nine blocked yin pathways.

Yu WonHak started his explanation while staring at Shin YuSung in a profound manner.

“Your blocked pathways give you an overabundance of mana, an exceptional mind, and god-like looks! But you also pass away before coming of age...”

At his words, Shin YuSung hid the surprised expression on his mouth. Then, with wide eyes, he asked:

“Am I gonna die?”

“How impatient! If that was the end of it, you probably would have! But you were born with another constitution—that is, an abundance of bodily yang!”

As Yu WonHak said, Shin YuSung had blocked yin pathways at the same time as abundance of yang. Yu WonHak grabbed the other's shoulders and laughed.

"Your body is overflowing with the energy that can cure your nine blocked yin pathways!"

Shin YuSung was born with two rare constitutions when it was incredibly unlikely for a single person on Earth to have even one. As a result, he ended up having overflowing mana, an extraordinary mind, stunning beauty from the nine blocked yin pathways, and a tough body from an abundance of bodily yang.

"This is the kind of talent that will never again appear in human history! And I am the only one who can make it bloom!"

As Yu WonHak clenched his fist, Shin YuSung hugged the man's leg.

"I like flowers!"

"Great! Train with me, and let's give those Trait-reliant hunters that are running around a shock! You will be born as the strongest hunter in this Martial Deity's Dwelling!"

The white-haired old man Yu WonHak laughed like a madman. Even at the age of 60, he had an unbelievably muscular body.

Of course, Shin YuSung, with no idea about what would be coming in his future, gave a bright smile with his nine-yin looks.

"Heh, the strongest hunter? I like that!"

* * *

Seven years old.

Yu WonHak shook his head as he looked at Shin YuSung, who had knocked down a wild boar.

“Tut tut! My rival, the Sword God, defeated a rank 2 monster when he was seven years old! You were born with such a cheat-like physique, yet that’s all that you can do?”

Eight years old.

Yu WonHak shook his head again when Shin YuSung destroyed a log with his bare hands.

“Hey! With your body, you should’ve destroyed three logs!”

Nine years old.

Yu WonHak shook his head yet again when Shin YuSung exploded the rank 2 monster, Sickie Mantis, with one blow.

“Tut tut! How will you become a hunter if your growth is this slow? With this amount of skill, you won’t last long as a hunter in active duty, let alone as a student in the Academy!”

“A-are they that strong?”

Shin YuSung looked at Yu WonHak with a sincere expression. As Shin YuSung was growing up, his looks were also blossoming because of the nine blocked yin pathways.

“Of course! Any of them at nine years old can kill a rank 3 monster with one blow!”

More time passed, and he became 13 years old.

Shin YuSung crossed his arms and blocked the Fist King, Yu WonHak’s fist. Even when Yu WonHak took care to limit his strength as much as possible, Shin YuSung flew back for a good while.

Crash!

Shin YuSung hit the wall, lightly landed on the floor, then harshly kicked at the ground.

Tup!

Catching up to Yu WonHak, Shin YuSung put himself into the position for a proper punch.

Bam!

He transferred his weight to his legs to erase any unsteadiness and channeled the strength that started from his feet to his legs, then to his waist.

Huff!

Shin YuSung twisted his waist and threw the punch. It was definitely not one of those shallow blows where one only moved their arm. Shin YuSung's proper punch had a miraculous quality to it that an ordinary 13-year-old could never hope to achieve.

Powww!

Shin YuSung's fist made an impact directly on Yu WonHak. But, his teacher had blocked that punch with one thumb. Yu WonHak was definitely one of the strongest hunters in the world.

"Too slow! I can't believe your punch at 13 years old is only at this level! If I had been born with a body like yours, I would've planted myself in the wall with that same blow!"

A sense of horror was slowly growing in Shin YuSung. How strong were hunters that he couldn't catch up to them even with this much training?

"They can't be only monstrously strong."

It was like so even when he was looking at his own teacher. If he wanted to, Yu WonHak could dominate someone at Shin YuSung's level with one finger.

‘If I go outside of the tower, I have to... fight monsters like Teacher...’

The scared Shin YuSung clenched his fist. Even if he couldn't be the strongest hunter, he still wanted to be a powerful one.

To repay the Fist King who believed in him and prove himself to the Shin family that had abandoned him. Shin YuSung happened to have an outstanding physique that could succeed in doing both.

“I'll work harder!”

As he energetically yelled that statement, Yu WonHak laughed vigorously.

“Kuhuhhuh! That's right, work harder! To become the strongest hunter!”

* * *

And it went on like that for four years.

17-year-old Shin YuSung was sitting under a waterfall with his legs twisted in the lotus position.

Roar!

Shin YuSung focused on his breathing as the water constantly battered his body. When he breathed in, he could feel the mana in the air, and when he breathed out, he pushed away his worldly thoughts.

The current Shin YuSung wasn't simply focused on the strengthening of his body but also in tune with many other things.

“You've come.”

Deep into his meditation, Shin YuSung opened his mouth.

Because of his blocked yin pathways, his voice rang clear and deep. It was a beautiful timbre that put the powerful roar of the waterfall to shame.

But Yu WonHak's boisterous voice completely buried the sound of the water in the valley.

"Tut tut! To think that today is our last day together! What a shame, what a shame!"

Yu WonHak still boasted a muscular body— actually, on the outside, he somehow looked like he grew younger.

"I'm also feeling regret... To think that I need to go out into the world despite still desperately needing your teachings."

Shin YuSung opened his eyes.

Youthful features were completely gone from 17-year-old Shin YuSung—he had completely matured in his looks, especially his well-toned muscles and his chiseled features. Yu WonHak still had an obvious look of displeasure.

"You sure do! When I think about the time when the Dark Witch, the Sword God, and I were 17... Hoo, I still need more time to cultivate your strength!"

"I'm ashamed."

Shin YuSung liked the man's teachings. He spent almost all of his 12 years at the Martial Deity's Manor with Yu WonHak. He couldn't believe that he had to leave them both. Yu WonHak looked at Shin YuSung and made a request.

"Do not let your guard down! The world of hunters is cruel!"

Yu WonHak had emphasized the strength of hunters to Shin YuSung during his training until his mouth had worn down. The cheat-like

attribute the Dark Witch had, the sixth sense the Sword God had that had surpassed human limits, the physique of the Fist King Yu WonHak; Shin YuSung became disheartened as he heard their stories as well as the other stories of legendary hunters.

“I’m still afraid. Can I graduate from the Academy when I’m facing off against hunters of that caliber...?”

“I’ll say this to you until you enroll, but graduating is completely done through your effort!”

With a serious expression, Yu WonHak tacked on an empty threat.

“Don’t even think about hunters if you are expelled! If you lose this chance, you’ll have to live the life of a civilian!”

Like he said: even after getting specialized teachings, if one does not graduate the Academy and receive a certificate, they cannot try to become a hunter—even with a Trait.

Of course, to be a hunter, one has to receive early education before enrolling in the Academy. Yu WonHak’s influence was what made it possible for Shin YuSung to ignore the entire process.

One of the strongest hunters that ruled over the era—Fist King Yu WonHak.

He threatened the principal of Gaon Academy, which was called Korea’s greatest Academy.

“I explained everything to the Academy... Well, they gave some conditions, too. You pass the enrollment exam on your own.”

Yu WonHak bitterly said that while digging a finger into his ear. Shin YuSung slowly got up and put on his clothes.

“Am I finally leaving after 12 years?”

“Yep.”

At his answer, Shin YuSung tied his long, wet hair, then wrapped bandages around his hands. Without a word, he stared at the Martial Deity's Manor and the Martial Deity's Mountain that he had lived in for 12 years.

Instead of training his Trait or abilities, Shin YuSung was a hunter who only strengthened his body. With his mental fortitude and the strength of his physique, he silently endured training that a normal hunter couldn't even imagine doing.

He did that for 12 years.

As a matter of fact, Yu WonHak had held a press conference the day before and had made a declaration with his title of Fist King on the line.

—I'll finally reveal my disciple, who you've been waiting for!

It was a world where popular hunters pulled in no less popularity than celebrities. The explosive declaration of a reclusive legend had the world already abuzz. Shin YuSung gave a quiet goodbye without knowing this fact.

“...Thank you for everything, Teacher.”

He left the Martial Deity's Mountain with those parting words. In fact, Shin YuSung was more unique than anyone else; he was the only one on Earth born with both the nine blocked yin pathways and an abundance of bodily yang—he had trained his body without even learning the name of his Trait.

And, as someone who had grown up in the Martial Deity's Mountain, the outside world was completely unknown to him. His existence itself was a natural monument. Even then, Shin YuSung was harboring a lot of worries.

‘...How strong are the Academy students?’

The one thing that was certain was that this was the appearance of a hunter that had never existed before.

Chapter 2

The headmaster's office of Gaon Academy.

Jin ByungCheol, the headmaster, was looking at Shin YuSung with a pleased expression.

“So, you're the disciple that WonHak, no, no! That the Fist King personally raised?”

Gaon was an academy that measured a student's worth by the skill they possessed. Jin ByungCheol bared his yellowing teeth in a grin at the fact that Shin YuSung was trained by the Fist King himself.

“Your Trait must be incredible! The Fist King has an S-rank one, after all! And, you must have polished it while you weren't going to the Academy, huh-huh! Go ahead, tell me what it is!”

Headmaster Jin ByungCheol asked this, expectations high. Shin YuSung shook his head.

“No, I've never used my Trait until now.”

“Hu-huh! Wh, what is that supposed to mean? If you are a hunter, you must surely be using your Trait...”

Jin ByungCheol's words were the most common of common sense, but they didn't register as such to Shin YuSung. Jin ByungCheol scratched his bald head* and tried asking again.

“So you know the rank of your Trait, right? You must have had it evaluated?”

But Shin YuSung shook his head again.

“It's F-rank.”

“W-what?”

Jin ByungCheol’s expectation-filled face contorted. It passed through his mind then that the Fist King had tricked him again.

‘He tormented me so much during his time as an active hunter, and now he’s foisting off a defective product like this on me?’

With none of the consideration that he had shown before, Jin ByungCheol glared at Shin YuSung and slammed his hands on the table.

“What kind of...? The disciple of the Fist King has an F-rank Trait? Are you messing with me?”

“But Master always told me to become a hunter who doesn’t rely on their Trait.”

Shin YuSung replied plainly without losing his composure, but Jin ByungCheol waved his hand as if to say that he didn’t want to hear any of it.

“Who’s saying that kind of crap? Even your master, the Fist King, was a hunter with an S-rank Trait!”

He looked at Shin YuSung disdainfully, hopping mad.

“I’ll just check your Trait right now. Give me your hand.”



As Shin YuSung obediently extended his hand, Jin ByungCheol pricked the boy's fingertip with a needle attached to a machine.

Drip.

A drop of blood was on the tip of the needle. Soon after, Shin YuSung's Trait was displayed on the screen.

[Rank: F]

[Trait: Heightened Focus]

[Effect: Heightens focus based on the amount of mana used.]

Jin ByungCheol leaned his forehead against his hands at the shocking results.

“Yu WonHak! You tricked me again! Calling someone with an F-rank Trait your disciple?!”

Shin YuSung watched the hopping-mad Jin ByungCheol without saying a word.

“Can I attend...? As expected, I don't have what it takes to become a hunter.”

The headmaster's rage towards Yu WonHak was needlessly spilling over to Shin YuSung. Jin ByungCheol felt that it was already unfair that he had to enroll F-ranks to meet the government's quota and felt displeasure at the idea of having more joining the Academy.

‘I'm more pissed off by the fact that he tricked me! I thought he'd be of help this time, but he's just giving me his dregs!’

Jin ByungCheol forcefully tamped down his anger, and said to Shin YuSung with a cold tone:

“...If you want to attend our Academy, you have to fulfill a condition I ask of you. Can you do that?”

Shin YuSung was someone who had not gone through the proper channels to attend the Academy.

His enrollment was entirely in the hands of Jin ByungCheol.

“Yes, whatever it is.”

With no other choice, Shin YuSung replied so in a civil manner. The headmaster gave a fishy smile.

“My condition is... a simple spar. If you win at a spar against a student I choose, I’ll let you enroll. How’s that? Will you do it?”

Shin YuSung’s Trait was F-rank.

But the headmaster was thinking of pitting Shin YuSung against a student with a D-rank Trait. Traits didn’t denote skill, but it was an indication of a hunter’s strength that could not be ignored.

“A spar...”

Shin YuSung started thinking deeply. It was discouraging even just recalling the hunters his master, Yu WonHak, had told him about. But there was no other option, no matter how much he looked for one. If he wanted to become one of the hunters that he had so admired, Shin YuSung had to graduate from the Academy.

Finishing his thoughts, he gave a nod to Jin ByungCheol and energetically shouted,

“I’ll do it!”

* * *

[First years – S Class]

The elite class of Korea’s finest academy, Gaon Academy. In Gaon Academy, classrooms weren’t decided by one’s skill, but by the rank of one’s abilities.

Of course, there was a pinnacle even in the elite class made up of S-rank abilities.

First place among the first years...

Her name was Adela Ortensia.

She was a young woman with sleek, glistening silver hair and a cold expression.

“...The disciple of the Fist King?”

Adela was considered the pinnacle of the students attending Gaon Academy. Even among the S class, who represented the school, she was considered especially talented. As soon as she opened her mouth to say something, the students around her started bombarding her with affirmations in a show of excessive devotion.

“Are you interested, Adela?”

“Should we go and investigate?”

“They probably aren’t that strong, I heard that they’re looking for their opponent in D class.....”

Adela didn’t respond, even as she was being barraged with questions. She propped up her chin with her hand and looked outside the window with a detached expression.

‘...The Fist King, the sole hunter who defeated my grandfather.’

She was a little intrigued, but shortly after closed her eyes and immersed herself in thoughts of the past. It was due to her grandfather that she had flown from Italy to Korea to enroll in Gaon Academy.

—Adela, the strongest hunter I’ve ever met is in Korea. If you also wish to attain the title of the strongest, go to Korea!

But to Adela, who was a genius among geniuses, even Korea’s Gaon Academy was too dull. Her record as her grade’s top student was ‘zero losses’. She had become the undisputable pinnacle of the first years.

‘If the Fist King’s skills are as real a deal as my grandfather implied... they’ll climb up here on their own, at the very least.’

So Adela had no interest in the situation.

If the new student really was the disciple of the Fist King, and showed a level of skill befitting it, she could test his strength then.

* * *

[First years – D Class]

The disciple of the Fist King.

The rumor concerning Shin YuSung’s enrollment was spreading even faster among the lower rank classes. Among them, one student raised their voice and shouted:

“They’re giving you 50SP if you win?!”

SP (School Points) were an extension of the school’s store system. Headmaster Jin ByungCheol was announcing that the student who won against Shin YuSung would be given 50SP.

It was a prize that anyone would covet.

The students’ conversations grew louder.

“Wow, shit... how many outing passes is that?”

“Like... 10? Whoa... should I apply?”

“Are you all crazy? How are you going to win against the disciple of the Fist King?”

“Didn’t you hear, though? Their Trait is apparently F-rank.”

“What? F-rank? It depends on how skilled they are, but isn’t this still totally free?”

Skiid! Thud!

At those words, one of the students kicked a desk aside.

Stomp stomp.

He slowly walked over to the table which was the focus of the discussion happening.

“Are you telling me that the Trait of the Fist King’s disciple is only F-rank?”

“Uh, yeah, HaJin-ah**... t-that’s what they’re saying.”

Joo HaJin.

He was fairly high up in the student rankings among those in the D class. The students who had lower rankings than him smiled awkwardly in an effort to get on his good side. As if pleased, Joo HaJin placed a hand on one of the students next to him and smirked.

“What the hell is that. That’s weird.”

“R-right?”

“Yeah, it’s fucking weird. Either that little shit is trying to con us, or the Fist King is all dementia-addled and washed up. Has to be one of the two, don’t you think?”

Joo HaJin thumped his classmate’s back then peeled the notice off the desk.

“I’ll be the one participating in the spar. If you’ve got a problem with that, let’s settle it with a fight.”

The students did want the 50SP, but didn’t have the courage to fight Joo HaJin for it. Of course, there were those in D class who had a higher ranking than him, but they were currently off doing extracurricular activities.

Joo Ha-jin, who had ended up taking care of the situation, looked at the notice and darted his tongue out.

“How should I pulverize this fraud?”

* * *

Shin YuSung was taking a stroll and looking around Gaon Academy.

“This place is huge.”

He couldn't help but be impressed. The size of the artificial island the school was built on could rival a city. You could tell how much support Gaon Academy was receiving from the government.

Hunters were the people's hope, entertainment, and profit. Citizens and corporations both wanted strong hunters.

Monster parts could be sold for money, and corporations advertised themselves by using the good reputation of hunters.

“...Of course, Master said those kinds of hunters were fake and hated them.”

As if drawn to it, Shin YuSung went off the path and into the forest. Gaon Academy's forest was a humongous, wide, and beautiful plot of land. Satisfied, Shin YuSung got into a stance. He had not missed a single day of training after meeting his master 12 years ago.

The Academy was currently in the middle of class, so there weren't any other students roaming around. If nothing else, the forest Shin YuSung was in was tranquil.

‘It's a perfect place to warm up.’

Shin YuSung closed his eyes.

He didn't know this himself, but Shin YuSung was subconsciously using his Trait. [Heightened Focus] didn't have much to it, as

expected of an F-rank Trait. To a hunter like Shin YuSung who had honed his skill in martial arts, however, it had a completely different effect.

As he started to concentrate, all of his senses started to freshly awaken. He could clearly hear the sound of the wind passing through the forest and could feel the minute tremors of his skin and his own breath.

Thanks to his Trait, he could use his meticulously honed senses to focus all of the mana in his body into his hand.

‘Expel the gathered mana from one, singular point.’

Shin YuSung, with his eyes closed, thrust his palm out in front of him.

Battle God Style – Savage Dragon’s Boulder Crushing Palm

Tap.

As his palm touched the giant tree, the destructive mana blew a large hole through the trunk.

Creek! Crash!

The tree, destroyed from the roots, lost its balance and fell. The shock of the fall created a gust of wind, lifting dust off the ground in a large cloud.

“So it’s only around this much.”

Shin YuSung looked at the fallen tree as if it was nothing. His master, the Fist King Yu WonHak, could destroy a tree of this size with one finger. So, to Shin YuSung, this level of training was nothing special.

“Starting with actual combat...”

He let out a sigh and turned his gaze towards the sparring arena.

‘He said the opponent’s Trait was D-rank, right?’

Even if Shin YuSung didn’t know who his opponent was, if they were someone with a D-rank Trait—much higher than his F-rank Trait—he assumed they would be incredibly strong.

‘Even if the level of my talent and Trait are both low, I have no choice but to devote myself to using them to reach my goal.’

Shin YuSung hated giving up more than anyone; it was a mindset that had been hammered into him while training to the point of death under the Fist King.

“I should start making my way there.”

Nine blocked yin pathways.

An abundance of bodily yang.

A combination of a talent that hadn’t existed in the world prior and the worst-of-the-worst F-rank Trait. After finishing his extravagant warmup, Shin YuSung walked towards the sparring arena.

Chapter 3

Gaon Academy's sparring arena.

A celebrity has come to visit this sacred training location.

“Yeow! It's far!”

Anchor Yu HanNah, often called the “billboard” of Korea's representative public service broadcast, K Channel. She was looking at the cameraman next to her, and her eyes blazed with the hunger for a scoop.

“Isn't this huge news?!”

“Uh, w-what is?”

The cameraman with a large body asked while wiping his sweat. Yu HanNah was all fired up, despite the cameras not even rolling.

“The hunter world's legend who sequestered himself for 20 years! The Fist King! They're saying the disciple of that Fist King is going to appear at the Academy!”

“T-that's... definitely news.”

“Fufu! But that's not even the end of it! According to the tip, that disciple is going to debut today with a spar! Iiiif!!”

Yu HanNah pointed to herself with a raised thumb to grab the cameraman's attention.

“I-if?”

Gulp.

Yu HanNah giggled cutely as the cameraman swallowed.

“Fufu! If we, K Channel, films his debut fight, wouldn’t that be huge?”

“Ohh!”

“What kind of reaction is that? Oh boy~ even explaining this to you has gotten to be a bother.”

She immediately opened her mouth again, even after she herself said that it was a bother.

“Anyways, the producer just ordered us to film it, so focus! Don’t miss anything! If it goes well, this can be the birth of a star hunter from his student days~ so focus! Focus! Capiche?”

“C-capiche!”

The robust cameraman nodded. Right then, Gaon Academy’s headmaster arrived at Yu HanNah immediately, despite having been far away.

“Oh my, what is K Channel doing at Gaon Academy? Are you perhaps here to interview our Adela?”

“Hm? Of course, we’re here for the disciple of the Fist King! I was under the impression that our news station, as your publicist, had the right to freely shoot anything here... is there a problem?”

As Yu Hannah squinted at Jin ByungCheol, he gulped and waved his hands together.

“Ah yes, you’re always welcome to shoot! B-but the student isn’t anyone strong enough to be worth broadcasting...”

“Oh no! A hunter’s star quality isn’t entirely dependent on their strength. And, headmaster?”

Yu HanNah shook her head, then thumped her chest. *Thump thump.*

“The decision to air the footage will be made by this broadcasting genius! This news rundown genius! By Yu HanNah! Don’t you get it? No one has an eye for star quality like I do!”

Jin ByungCheol laughed good-naturedly while thinking to himself:

‘...She’s definitely crazy.’

But this was a society where being popular with the mass public was synonymous with the level of renown of a corporation, which led to more grants. The headmaster always had to look good to the mass media.

‘Hum... they’re too excited. Even if he’s the disciple of the Fist King, no, that Yu WonHak, he can’t win against a D Class student with his F-rank Trait... what should I do?’

While the headmaster was deep in thought, the participant from D Class, Ju HaJin, was mussing up his orange hair and stepping onto the white tiled stage of the sparring arena.

“Now then, first-year D Class Ju HaJin. All ready.”

Shin YuSung drew the attention of the crowd as he slowly walked onto the arena.

“I’m also ready.”

Right then, everyone lost it. The first reason was because of the arrival of Shin YuSung, the one with the title of the disciple of the Fist King. The second reason was because of the good looks he had gotten from his nine yin blocked pathways.

“Oh, t-take a look at that. This is a first, even for me.”

Yu HanNah’s eyes were sparking while looking at Shin YuSung. She tapped the cameraman who was next to her.

“His face is perfect. Go ahead and zoom into it! Zoom! Zoom!”

“O-okay!”

While the two were focused on Shin YuSung’s looks and his star quality, the students were starting to wonder about his skills.

“Will he fight well, even with an F-rank Trait?”

“Well... Traits and skill aren’t completely proportionate to each other.”

“Naw, even then, fighting a D Class student... Wouldn’t it be a bit too hard for an F-rank Trait to win against that?”

The din was increasingly getting louder.

Shin YuSung ignored all such distracting sounds and concentrated on his opponent. Ju HaJin made fun of Shin YuSung’s sincere attitude.

“Hey, why’re you so tense? Can you even spar properly when you’re so scared?”

But Shin YuSung was cautious and careful, never lowering his guard in front of his opponent. He was taught by the Fist King to give his all against any foe.

Ju HaJin, whose specialty was trash-talking, was dissatisfied with Shin YuSung’s demeanor.

‘Why’s he not reacting? It ain’t fun unless they get worked up by my taunts... ’

An angry opponent’s movements became wider and created openings. Of course, that sort of taunting didn’t work on Shin YuSung.

Ju HaJin spat on the ground and lowered his stance.

“Tch, no fun... well, whatever.”

“I look forward to a good fight.”

At Ju HaJin's movements, Shin YuSung got into stance as well, putting one foot in front. As he did so, the speakers started to make an announcement.

—The spar will soon start.

Shin YuSung looked at Ju HaJin's stance and fell into thought.

'What a poor posture with an incredible number of openings. What are his intentions?'

—Get ready!

Shin YuSung looked at Ju HaJin with a serious expression while steadying his balance with both legs.

'...What an easygoing expression. So he's sure he'll win, even with a stance like that.'

He concluded that Ju HaJin's sloppy stance was a kind of handicap.

'What incredible confidence.'

—Start!

* * *

As the speakers announced the start of the match, Ju HaJin kicked at the ground with his feet. He ran dizzying circles around Shin YuSung.

"Kuhaha!"

His Trait, [Speed Up], made him faster the more he ran. Ju HaJin fought by heightening his speed as much as he could to assure that his blows would connect.

"How's this? You can't see me, huh?"

Even at the question, Shin YuSung didn't reply. Instead, he followed

Ju HaJin's movements with his eyes.

‘What’s going on?’

He was panicking because of Ju HaJin's actions.

‘...He's slow.’

The reason was because Ju HaJin was incredibly slow.

‘...He's much too slow.’

This was because of Shin YuSung's Trait, [Heightened Focus]. When he poured all of his focus into combat, he would subconsciously use [Heightened Focus] and increase his concentration.

Shin YuSung's world was moving very slowly due to this.

“Eat this!”

Ju HaJin threw a triumphant kick at Shin YuSung, but the other boy dodged his leg and aimed a punch at his torso.

Battle God Style Third Form – Heaven Shattering Fist Strike

Craaack!

In a flash, Shin YuSung's punch hit Ju HaJin squarely in the torso. The impact made a shockwave and lifted Ju HaJin's body into the air.

“Keuk!”

Boooooom!

Shin YuSung didn't immediately assume that the Academy hunters that his master told him about would be taken down this easily.

‘Maybe he has a Trait related to absorption? Or is his body is strong

enough against regular hits to take an attack of this caliber with no protection?’

He didn’t think about it for long. Quickly making a decision, Shin YuSung blasted energy in front of him from his palm.

Crash!

A perfect combination play.

Shin YuSung’s martial arts skills, which he had been honing all this time, displayed the full potential of the nine blocked yin pathways and the abundance of bodily yang.

‘He can’t have been hit by that blow so easily. Maybe his Trait has something to do with illusions...? I also have to keep the possibility of his Skill in mind.’

The ragged Ju HaJin was hit by a shockwave and flew back, but Shin YuSung’s assault did not stop.

‘In any case, since I don’t have enough information, I’ll have to put my all into my blows.’

His master, the Fist King Yu WonHak, had a saying that he often said.

[It’s important to have a finisher for every attack]

Shin YuSung never went easy on his opponent as long as he was in a fight.

Bam!

He kicked the ground with his foot.

His well-trained physique actually ended up overtaking the flying Ju HaJin. Shin YuSung lifted his foot towards Ju HaJin, who was sailing towards him.

Battle God Style First Form – Falling Moon Kick

He twisted the foot he was using as a fulcrum and transferred the momentum to his other foot.

Bam!

His clean roundhouse kick bunted Ju HaJin into the air like a ball. Unlike Fist King Yu WonHak, who had a repertoire of punching attacks befitting his name, Shin YuSung's techniques had a larger degree of freedom.

Nine blocked yin pathways.

Abundance of bodily yang.

His physique had surpassed human limits. Unlike modern hunters who always relied on their Traits, he had honed his innate strength.

Even if his Trait was F-rank, Shin YuSung was on the path of pursuing the peak of martial arts.

Bam! Boom!



As Ju HaJin fell out of the bounds of the arena, a few of the students nearby screamed in shock.

Shin YuSung also looked at Ju HaJin with a shocked expression.

‘Err, no way? Is that really the level of his skills?’

His thoughts were the complete truth.

Soon after, an announcement came out of the speakers to prove it.

—First-year D Class student, Ju HaJin, has lost by falling out of bounds.

That was when Shin YuSung finally looked at his surroundings.

Admiration and astonishment. The headmaster, Yu HanNah, and the students were mired in shock.

“He beat up someone that was already out cold...”

“Into tatters...”

“A-a demon! He’s a total demon!”

Shin YuSung was shocked at suddenly being labeled a demon, but the students were already revering him as one.

“The Fist King has created a demon!”

Headmaster Jin ByungCheol rushed up to him with an elated expression.

“Kuuuuu! As expected of the Fist King! You’re definitely Yu WonHak’s disciple!”

“I-is my spar partner...”

As Shin YuSung shakily asked while pointing at Ju HaJin, Jin ByungCheol firmly waved his hands.

“Oh! Gaon Academy’s medical nanomachines are the best in the world! So don’t worry about that!”

Yu HanNah, who was filming, belatedly ran towards Shin YuSung as well.

“Fist King’s disciple! You’re student Shin YuSung, right? This is your debut fight. Do you have any first impressions or anything you want to say?”

Shin YuSung pondered over what to say while giving a blank look at the interview microphone. It felt incredibly clear to him what he was feeling.

“Um...”

As Shin YuSung opened his mouth to speak, everyone at the sparring arena held their breath. With a bemused expression, he continued:

“The opponent was too weak.”

The audience couldn’t say anything to the unexpected response. The silence awkwardly permeated the arena. Shin YuSung’s interview would be one that would go down in K Channel’s and Gaon Academy’s history.

* * *

The next day.

[Fist King’s Disciple! Accepted to the Academy!]

[Exclusive footage of his spar on K Channel!]

[TV Ratings Already Over 9%...]

News of Shin YuSung decorated several different headlines. Of course, the image of him portrayed in the news was very different from his actual personality.

[Shin YuSung: declares that opponent is too weak]

[Shin YuSung, a controversial personality! Didn't stop the spar even when his opponent had fainted.....]

[Shin YuSung, already called a demon in the Academy.....]

Gaon Academy, the cream of the crop of South Korea and the world; even there, the first impressions of Shin YuSung were shocking.

Of course, his opponent was a mere D Class student. The reason he still grabbed so much attention was because of several star-like qualities he possessed.

An F-rank Trait...

Beautiful looks from the nine blocked yin pathways...

A hand-to-hand-based hunter, which was rare to find in this day and age...

At this moment in time, Shin YuSung was causing enough ripples to rival an S-rank hunter.

The world's attention became focused on one point.

Chapter 4

The Hunter Association's South Korean branch.

The hunters deemed the best of the best had gathered together in the location named Sky Town for a meeting.

Among them, a man wearing glasses started speaking while pointing to a giant screen.

“Here is the list of artifacts that will be distributed this year.”

[Elixir: 10,000 Year-Old Ice Crystal]

[Weapon: Silver Moon Blade]

[Outfit: Black Dragon's Hide]

[.....]

A man with an eye covered by a black eyepatch started posturing, with his feet resting on the table.

“Ah~ it's China's turn this time, right? They're definitely loaded. The artifact list is really good.”

The beautiful woman next to him gave a captivating laugh, as if in a good mood. Her sensual body and the long legs peeking out of the slit of her cheongsam* made her look like a model, but she was a top-class hunter.

“10,000 Year-Old Ice Crystal. Silver Moon Blade. Black Dragon's Hide. Fufu, they're all classified as legendary-grade artifacts. We put some effort in this.”

Legendary-grade artifacts were rare enough to be of note even on the national level. A man with a scabbard strapped to his side also seemed to be a fan of the items listed.

“I wonder who will get these artifacts...”

The man with the eyepatch snorted.

“The ones with S-rank and A-rank Traits will gobble them up. To be honest, I’m rooting for our Adela. She’s a genius among geniuses.”

Adela Ortensia.

1st place among her peers at Gaon Academy, a school considered the most prestigious out of them all. A student with unequaled skill, even as a first-year. There were many corporations and high-level hunters who wanted Adela.

But the beauty wearing the cheongsam shook her head.

“...Can she do it by herself? This time, the disciple of the legendary Fist King is attending Gaon Academy.”

It seemed like the beauty had watched the footage of Shin YuSung that K-channel had broadcasted. As if in agreement, the man with an eyepatch next to her nodded.

“Yu WonHak sure is something else. He’s unbelievably strong and he takes an F-rank Trait as his disciple. He’s messed up in many ways.”

The hunter with the blade seemed to take issue with the fact that the Fist King had chosen someone with an F-rank Trait to be his disciple.

“Did they say his name was Shin YuSung? The Fist King could have had his pick of students with incredible talent. So why did he choose that child?”

“Only he can know the answer to that.”

As the beauty gave a subtle smile, the old man with white hair, who had been listening quietly this entire time, opened his mouth.

“Hur hur... don’t get too excited at a bunch of unripe fruit.”

This old man was the president of the South Korean Association branch, Kang YuChan. He was a man who had risen to the top of the hunter world during the earlier, tumultuous era—as opposed to the current hunter world that had capitalism woven into it.

On top of that, Association President Kang Yu-chan was the Fist King’s, Yu WonHak’s, comrade and rival. He was secretly happy when the reclusive Fist King had announced a disciple.

“Our WonHak definitely created some kind of monster. At the very least, until he graduates the academy...”

Kang YuChan opened his eyes. The pupils shining through the slits of his eyelids were brimming with power.

“Wait and see.”

The Hunter Association was carefully stacking the deck by putting legendary artifacts on the line. Of course, on the surface, the reason they were doing this was to [foster the students’ growth]. The actual reason was different.

[International Academy Competition]

Each nation put its pride on the line in this event through its representatives. The real objective of this competition was to pit nations against each other to discover which was the strongest.

Countries were established, and corporations improved their image through this event. There was an endless number of additional benefits to winning.

A hunter’s strength was the strength of a country.

The [International Academy Competition] was an event where nations

boasted the strength of their futures through their academy students.

The Association president Kang Yu-chan was wondering which students to choose as the representative members for South Korea. Among the candidates was Shin YuSung.

It was nothing but a slight interest, but Korea's strongest had taken notice of him.

* * *

Gaon Academy's headmaster, Jin ByungCheol.

He was staring at Shin YuSung while pouring high-quality green tea worth several 10,000 won** per cup. His gaze was dripping with sweetness, and he had a broad grin on his face.

"Oh! What impeccable skill befitting the Fist King's, Yu WonHak's, disciple!"

Jin ByungCheol offered the tea while laughing warmly.

"Hahaha! I trusted you from the start! A D Class student must have been a piece of cake to defeat for the Fist King's disciple!"

Skill above all. There was no reason for the headmaster of Gaon Academy to neglect someone who had a lot of it—especially during these times since there were a lot of formidable rival academies.

"First of all, I congratulate you on your enrollment! The problem is that you need to be assigned to a dorm..."

Jin ByungCheol gave a small cough and glanced at Shin YuSung to try and gauge his reaction.

"Is there a problem?"

Shin YuSung asked quietly, without even touching the cup of green tea. Jin ByungCheol scratched his head and carefully spoke.

“It’s an issue with your class and the dorms. In our academy, we place students in classes corresponding to their Traits, not their skill level.”

He was right.

S-rank Traits went to S Class.

A-rank Traits went to A Class.

But Shin YuSung’s Trait was F-rank. Therefore, he had to be sorted into the Academy’s F class, which was called the absolute worst.

“It’s inappropriate for the headmaster to say this, but the standards of F Class are much too low for someone like you. To be honest, if I could, I would just get rid of all of the F Class students, but because of the government quota... Ah! Of course, you’re an exception, huh huh!”

As Jin ByungCheol excessively babbled on in an effort to please Shin YuSung, the boy laughed and told the other man that it was okay.

“It’s fine; please place me in F Class.”

“You’re okay with it? Haha! So the next issue is your dorm...”

There was another problem.

Gaon Academy assigned dorms based on a student’s student rankings—in other words, their grades. 1st place to 10th, 11th place to 20th, and so on. The dorm facilities were different every 10 places in the rankings, and those placed higher received better lodgings.

This harsh meritocracy had a lot of dissenters, but all criticisms were swept away in the face of Gaon Academy maintaining first place in overall student grades.

It was an issue even the headmaster couldn’t do anything about. Jin ByungCheol carefully brought up the topic once more.

“You were assigned the absolute lowest tier of dorms. I tried to do something, but there isn’t much that I can do when you don’t have any grades to speak of yet. It’s not like there are a lot of cases where someone attends the school in the middle of the year, either...”

Shin YuSung nodded his head as if to say there was nothing that could have been done.

“That’s alright. I’ve slept on tree branches plenty of times to escape predator animals.”

Jin ByungCheol took his words as a joke and burst into laughter.

“Kuhaha! Yes, you’re right! Our dorm’s beds are more comfortable than tree branches! For the record, the bed is made out of hardwood as well.”

Essentially, if you were unhappy with how you were being treated, you could do something about it by proving your skills. That wasn’t the part that Shin YuSung was curious about.

“The student that I just fought... What was his student ranking?”

“Ju HaJin? Hm... he’s reported to be on the strong side among the D Class members. Among 210 students... maybe around 100th place?”

“So at least half of the first years are as weak as that student?”

Jin ByungCheol nodded at Shin YuSung’s question.

“Well, you could say that in regards to sparring level.”

At his response, Shin YuSung felt deeply confused, as his worldview had been shattered.

‘W-wait, Master definitely said that Gaon Academy was Korea’s best...’

To think that half of the students at this academy were weaker than

the Ju HaJin he had beaten earlier today. Shin YuSung chewed on his master's words again.

[YuSung-ah! There are hunters everywhere who are stronger than I am!"]

If the Ju HaJin he saw today faced off against the Fist King Yu WonHak, he would have probably been killed by the man yawning.

"A-are there any stronger hunters?"

Jin ByungCheol laughed, "Kuhaha!" at the bewildered Shin YuSung's desperate question.

"Why wouldn't there be? There are plenty of students stronger than Ju HaJin! Especially those in the top 7 of our student rankings, they're called the Seven Numbers! They're the pride of our school! They're a whole level above the other students!"

At those words, Shin YuSung's expression finally calmed down.

"I see, the Seven Numbers..."

"Oh, are you interested in them? As expected of the Fist King's disciple, you have ambition!"

Because of the spar, Jin ByungCheol had a lot of goodwill towards Shin YuSung.

'...As expected of the Fist King's disciple! It's a little too early for him, but if he's raised well, I could have him participate in the International Competition!'

There was no higher honor in the meritocratic Gaon Academy for Shin YuSung than winning the competition and bringing back an artifact.

Jin ByungCheol laughed with these black-hearted thoughts in mind. At the same time, Shin YuSung gave a beautiful smile while thinking:

‘The headmaster is so kind. I knew he was a good person.’

‘Just keep doing what you’re doing! Fufu!’

Their hearts were misaligned.

Jin ByungCheol patted Shin YuSung’s back while giving him a good-natured smile. If Shin YuSung really had Fist King-level potential, he could probably even win against ‘that student’ who was going to represent China.

‘That man’s disciple is in China. One of the most skilled participants, he probably already has been seeded... the disciple of the Sword God!’

If Korea had the Fist King, China had the Sword God. The two were rivals who were always fighting each other for the title of the strongest.

‘...So their students have inherited their feud.’

Jin ByungCheol’s heart felt full just thinking about it.

‘I’ll have to watch his growth for a bit longer, of course...’

Tap.

He stood up from his seat and gestured towards the door.

‘Now you are a full-fledged student of Gaon Academy! I’ve assigned you a guide who will give you a tour of the school.’

“By a guide, you mean...?”

At Shin YuSung’s bemusement, Jin ByungCheol gave him a considerate grin and led him to the door.

“Haha, come, come, follow me. They should be waiting for you right outside this door.”

“Oh, thank you very much.”

“Oh, and~ I thought it would be best if someone from the same dorm level and class as you were here to explain the school’s facilities. So, the guide is a student from the F Class and lives in the lowest dorm tier.”

F Class and the lowest tier dorms...

That meant that the student serving as a guide was smack dab at the bottom of the student rankings.

“I see.”

Shin YuSung replied and nodded his head. Like the headmaster had told him, there was a male student waiting in front of the headmaster’s office. As he saw Shin YuSung, his eyes shone as if seeing a celebrity, and he started making a huge fuss.

“Ohhh! Hello! Nice to meet you! Is it okay if I just call you YuSung? Hehe, wait, does that make us sound like we’re too close?”

His actions were reminiscent of a puppy.

The male student beamed and continued.

“Anyways, it’s such an honor! That the Demon of the Arena would be attending our F Class!”

Shin YuSung, who was listening silently all this time, spoke up with a bemused expression.

“...Demon of the Arena? What’s that?”

“Hm? That’s what they’re calling you.”

Shin YuSung couldn’t say anything as the smiling student pointed at him.



Chapter 5

[First grade – D Class]

Ju HaJin was fine on the outside thanks to the nanomachine treatment, but the same could not be said about the inside.

‘...His skill was definitely on the level of the Fist King’s disciple.’

Ju HaJin could never forget Shin YuSung’s movements. He especially couldn’t believe that the boy was also a student like he was.

‘I can’t believe that he can display such skill with an F-rank Trait, not even an S-rank one.....’

While Ju HaJin was shaking in fear, the D Class students were cheering while looking at the screen.

[Intramural Competition Matchups]

[D Class VS F Class]

[Winning team gets 30SP]

“Okay, nice! We got F Class!”

“Where should we spend the 30SP? An outing pass?”

“Victory is in the bag! Okay! Just gotta do well on the exam!”

The students seemed ecstatic to be facing off against F Class, called the absolute weakest class. The F Class students with F-rank Traits were widely regarded to be the weakest class.

But Ju HaJin, who had been completely curb stomped by Shin

YuSung, started sweating.

‘F Class? Our opponent is F Class?’

He still hadn’t forgotten the terror of being beaten up by Shin YuSung. Even if his mind somehow forgot it, his body definitely had not. As proof of that, Ju HaJin’s legs were wobbling like jelly.

‘T-that guy is in that class!’

As if someone had read his mind, another classmate raised their voice and said:

“Hey wait, the new student is in F Class. Are we gonna be okay?”

“The Fist King’s disciple? Eh, no matter how strong he is, he’s just one person! What can he do by himself?”

The female student next to them giggled while covering her mouth with her hand.

“That’s true~ can he even do anything when all of those F Class trash are bogging him down?”

As talk of Shin YuSung was brought up, everyone’s attention naturally started to focus on Ju HaJin. The female student who had spoken up earlier approached him to ask:

“HaJin-ah~ what do you think?”

“M-me? Of course D Class will win! What kind of question is that?”

He boasted because of his pride, but his heart was shaking like a reed.

‘E-even that guy... can’t win against numbers, right? No, with that level of skill, couldn’t he just destroy everyone?’

The proud Ju HaJin, of course, continued to put on airs.

“Ugh, the more I think about it, the more I regret it! If I didn’t underestimate him, I could’ve at least tied against him...”

Even as he was saying all that, Shin YuSung was constantly on Ju HaJin’s mind.

‘I wonder what that guy’s doing?’

Dorm assignment? Exam preparation?

No matter what it was, Ju HaJin prayed wholeheartedly that Shin YuSung would not participate in the intramural competition.

* * *

Gaon Academy grounds.

The boy in charge of giving Shin YuSung a tour was named Lee SiWoo. Even when he was a span* shorter than Shin YuSung, Lee SiWoo was energetically dragging the taller boy around.

“This is the training room! Gaon Academy has some incredible facilities, so you can do a good variety of practices here!”

“Thank you. How do I use it?”

“There should be a manual about the facilities in your dorm.”

Shin YuSung gave a hollow laugh as Lee SiWoo looked at him with shining, expectant eyes. He took a step closer towards Shin YuSung and asked a question.

“Is there anything else you’re curious about?”

“Not the training room, I’m fine with it.”

“Is that so? Then!”

Brown hair whipping in the air, Lee SiWoo again dragged Shin

YuSung somewhere else.

Next, he led them to seven buildings arranged in order and started to explain.

“Our academy has a different building for each class. S Class is at the end there~ and F Class is right in front of us.”

Shin YuSung stared at the building without a word for some time. Lee SiWoo sneakily walked up beside Shin YuSung and pointed to the F Class building.

“Actually, everyone is really excited for your arrival here. We have to participate in the intramural competition after our next exam...”

“An intramural competition, meaning...”

“Like it implies, a fight between classes. It’s why the mood in F Class is so gloomy, like a mourner’s home.”

Shin YuSung asked no further questions at Lee SiWoo’s words. All of the F Class students were F-rank tier. Without someone outside the norm like Shin YuSung, they had a hard time winning against any other class.

Shin YuSung, who was entering F Class in the middle of those circumstances, was their hope.

“There’s no need to be too nervous. Everyone here... has pretty much given up on winning the intramurals.”

As Lee SiWoo explained with a bitter expression, Shin YuSung, in lieu of comforting words, gave a curt reply.

“Don’t worry, I’ll do my best.”

Shin YuSung, who got enrolled in F Class, was the disciple of the Fist King—and no less. It was unknown what sort of skill that Shin YuSung could display if he tried his best.

Lee SiWoo was very much looking forward to it. But, instead of showing his anticipation, he looked at Shin YuSung and gave a gentle smile.

“Okay~ let’s do well!”

Finished with his speech, Lee SiWoo held out his hand.

Shin YuSung stared at it for a long while.

“Sounds good.”

Squeeze.

Shin YuSung shook hands with Lee SiWoo.

12 years of continuous training after leaving the orphanage at five. The only human connection he had during that time was his master-student relationship with the Fist King. To that Shin YuSung, Lee SiWoo was the first person he had ever befriended.

Shin YuSung, after finishing the handshake, walked with Lee SiWoo to the dorms and fell deep in thought.

‘...An intramural competition, huh.’

The intramurals didn’t have any strong ties to the student rankings. It wasn’t an important event to Shin YuSung, who was aiming to be the strongest.

‘But...’

He remembered the talk he had with the Fist King a month before enrolling at the Academy.

[YuSung-ah! When you enroll at the Academy, you have to hit the ground running!]

[Are you saying that I have to run away?]

[No, I mean you have to stand out! Draw people's attention towards you!]

[Is there a reason I should do that?]

[Of course! Use your brain and think about it!]

As Shin YuSung cocked his head, Fist King Yu WonHak had pinched his forehead and followed up with an explanation.

[There's a whole gaggle of people at the Academy wearing the same uniform! Do you think any of the active hunters will take notice of you if you sit there all meek-like? You gotta at least get one person! Make sure your face is known!]

[So you're saying that it's important that they're aware of me?]

[Yes! If you want to earn a lot of money, pick up a bunch of elixirs, and win some artifacts~ prominence is key!]

Like the Fist King had said, even students—as long as they build up recognition—could have their hands on money in the six-digit figures; it was also possible for them to take part in events to win artifacts or elixirs.

After reminiscing, Shin YuSung started to analyze his thoughts.

The strongest hunter was a title his master, the Fist King, repeated until they wore his lips down. Even though the thought of it constantly scared him, Shin YuSung's goal was to become the strongest, the same as his master.

‘...If I want to be acknowledged as the strongest in the world, I have to—at the very least—be chosen to be the representative of the International Competition.’

To do that, it wasn't enough to simply be strong. The representative for the International Competition was decided by a citizen's election. To get votes, prominence was key.

‘Master said that it’s a day and age where it’s important for a hunter to have prominence.’

The world was in an era dominated by entertainment.

Even a minor event like the intramurals wasn’t something to gloss over. After his analysis, Shin YuSung opened the door to his dorm room.

Crreeaakk!

Worn wooden furniture and appliances that you could not gauge the age of. The facilities of the lowest-grade dorms were worse than one could imagine.

Lee SiWoo, who was next to him, laughed as if embarrassed.

“...O-our school discriminates pretty harshly, huh?”

But Shin YuSung responded with a carefree smile.

“It’s not bad.”

To someone like him, who had trained hellishly for 12 years, these amenities were good enough. After seeing Ju HaJin’s strength, he didn’t think it would take a long time to raise his student ranking, anyways.

‘Until then, this standard of living is fine.’

* * *

The day after Shin YuSung’s enrollment.

The first grade F Class students were all gathered in the training room.

“Isn’t today sparring day?”

“What are you talking about? Today is Image Room day. Idiot.”

The students were talking with each other, as no one had given them any instructions. Then, a man wearing a golden qipao slowly walked into the room.

“Hello, nice to meet you. I haven’t met any of you before, right? I’m Lin Xiao.”



Instead of the instructor, a man they had never met before had walked into the room. The students were bewildered. As today was his first class, Shin YuSung had no idea what the students' murmurings were about.

Right then, a student raised a hand.

“Er, isn’t it Mr. MyungOh’s class today?”

Lin Xiao closed his eyes and laughed at the question, shaking his head.

“Not anymore. He was scouted by China and left the Academy.”

At his response, the murmurings of the students grew louder. Lin Xiao drew attention back to himself.

“Enough! That’s just how life is. Money is everything. The only thing I want to point out is that I was scouted from China’s Skyscraper by Gaon Academy, and he left Korea to go to China. How ironic.”

Even with such fluency in Korean, Lin Xiao was Chinese. It wasn’t anything surprising, of course. As South Korea became known for its strong hunters, many countries chose Korean as their second language.

Lin Xiao crinkled his forehead as he looked at the students, highlighting his thick eyebrows.

“Everyone here looks like they’re missing a few brain cells. I can smell your mother’s milk from you all. There isn’t a single person here who looks like a hunter...”

While speaking, Lin Xiao’s eyes landed and were stuck on Shin YuSung.

“What’s your name?”

“It’s Shin YuSung.”

“Your body is pretty well developed.”

Lin Xiao approached Shin YuSung, examined his body here and there, and was genuinely impressed.

“I like it even more now that I’ve had a close look at it! You haven’t

skipped on your training!”

Lin Xiao didn't know that Shin YuSung was the disciple of the Fist King, but still seemed like he was in approval of his physique that he had trained up.

“You said your name was Shin YuSung, right? You first, then! What level of the Image Room have you beaten up to?”

At Lin Xiao's question, Lee SiWoo, who was next to Shin YuSung, raised his hand to assist him.

“YuSung was just enrolled yesterday, so he's never gotten to try the Image Room!”

Lin Xiao narrowed his eyes at Lee SiWoo's explanation.

“...Is he telling the truth?”

“Yes, that's the truth.”

Shin YuSung replied calmly. Lin Xiao clasped his hands behind his back and paced, throwing another question at him.

“Even still, you should have an idea of what level you are, right? Can you at least kill two rank 2 monsters?”

After thinking about it briefly, Shin YuSung lifted three fingers. Lin Xiao snorted before he could control himself.

“You 're saying an F Class student can kill a rank 3 monster?”

“Yes, I should be able to kill up to five of them at once.”

At his answer, Lin Xiao crinkled his forehead again.

“Talk about bravado. An F Class student is going to kill five rank 3 monsters?”

Students with F-rank Traits were gathered in F Class. Lin Xiao didn't think a student from that class could clear such a high level of the Room.

“Then...”

Shin YuSung tied his long hair up with a carefree smile. At the entrance to the Image Room, he declared while looking at Lin Xiao:

“I will prove it on my own.”

Shin YuSung was the type to let his actions speak louder than his words.

Chapter 6

Shin YuSung confidently scanned his card for the Image Room. A clear, mechanical voice read his information out loud.

[Your student card has been scanned.]

[Student ranking undefined, F Class Shin YuSung]

He had no ranking because he hadn't taken any exams yet. Before Shin YuSung could reply, Lee SiWoo broke free from the group of students and rushed towards him.

"H-hey, YuSung-ah! It's not that I don't believe in you or anything, but..."

Lee SiWoo looked up at Shin YuSung with worry tinging his face.

"Isn't this your first time using the Image Room? But you're trying to beat five rank 3 monsters... Is that really okay? On top of that, the training you do during class factors into your grades..."

The reactions of the other F Class students were also generally negative. Shin YuSung may have won against Ju HaJin, but that was just a spar. Image Room training was a completely different experience.

"This is my first time in the training room, but—"

Shin YuSung straightened his long hair and smiled.

"—it isn't the first time I've fought a rank 3 monster."

Veen.

The door opened automatically, and Shin YuSung slowly walked into the Image Room.

[You have entered the Image Room.]

Veen.

As the door closed, Shin YuSung took a brief glance behind him; 29 students were staring back with varied reactions and expressions.

The weakest Traits, F-rank.

Gaon Academy's weakest class, F Class.

But the majority of his classmates didn't believe that he could clear the room.

'I guess a rank 3 monster is hard to beat for the people in F Class.'

Shin YuSung's Trait was F-rank.

An F-rank student killing five rank 3 monsters in their first year was nothing short of a miracle, but it was something he could easily achieve.

'...A hunter's strength doesn't come entirely from their Trait.'

Following the manual that he had read last night at his dorm, Shin YuSung expertly operated the Image room.

"Location: random."

Zzt.

As Shin YuSung finished speaking, the Image Room, which was nothing but white from top to bottom, turned into a barren wasteland.

[The location has been set to wastelands.]

This was a hologram created by the facility.

Shin YuSung kept modifying the settings.

“Monsters: Five rank 3s.”

[Setting: Fighting monsters. Difficulty: Rank 3, five orcs.]

Zzt!

Perfectly crafted orc holograms spawned in the room as the mechanical voice finished speaking.

To Shin YuSung, who had been stuck living in the mountains, the Gaon Academy facilities were fascinating. It seemed like the rank 3 monsters were what was fascinating the Class F students, however.

As the glass walls weren't soundproof, Shin YuSung could hear his classmates' voices through it.

“An actual rank 3 monster...”

“And orcs even have intelligence.”

“Even still, I think... he'll kill at least three out of the five?”

The instructor, Lin Xiao, looked at Shin YuSung with his arms crossed.

‘I'll be observing just how long you can survive this.’

Shin YuSung swung his head back to look at the orcs. Even if they were just holograms, they felt as vividly real as actual monsters. As orcs had high intelligence, they could create their own parties and formations.

Because of that, five orcs had pretty good synergy.

‘For their weapons: one glaive, two bows, two axes.’

Shin YuSung shifted his stance to best suit his opponents. He led with his left foot and pulled back his right. His arm was perfectly balanced to cover the bottom half of his body. The posture of the only disciple of the Fist King was more or less the same as his master's.

‘Master told me this when I was nine.’

[Of course! Any hunter at nine years old can kill a rank 3 monster with one blow!]

In reality, the Fist King's standards were much too high. His training regimen was something that only someone born with the nine blocked yin pathways and abundance of bodily yang, like Shin YuSung, could successfully complete.

‘To think that anyone attending the Academy is frightened of a rank 3 monster... ’

Was F Class weak, or were rank 3 monsters strong? No matter which it was, he definitely believed there was some sort of mistake in his master's teachings.

Paaat!

Shin YuSung pulled mana from inside his body and wrapped it around himself. This was not the power of a Trait—through building up his mana with training and meditation, he was able to physically manifest it.

Despite being holograms, the orcs reacted to Shin YuSung's show of force.

“Keek! Kill the human!”

“Human! We'll punish you!”

Fwoosh!

The orcs' first attack was an arrow.

Shin YuSung tilted his head to the side and easily dodged it, then dashed forwards. At the same moment in time, he struck with his fist.

Boom!

The orc that was hit by his punch turned into dust along with his axe; the orc had completely dispersed into tiny bits of data. Shin YuSung threw a kick before any of the orcs had the chance to be surprised.

Crunch!

His foot landed squarely on another orc's head.

With the sound of a watermelon being split in half, that orc also dispersed into data.

“K-keek! Human! Strong!”

“Shoot the bow!”

The orcs took that chance to shoot another arrow. Two arrows flew towards Shin YuSung. He started to concentrate in an effort to dodge the attacks, and, due to his Trait's power, the arrows became infinitely slower.

‘I can see it.’

He slipped in between the arrows and ran like the wind. It wasn't enough to just win—Shin YuSung restricted himself to performing only the most efficient movements. He did not perform a single unnecessary action.

Tap!

He closed the gap in an instant and struck out with his palm.

Battle God Style – Savage Dragon's Boulder Crushing Palm

Boom!

The shockwave caused by the explosion turned two orcs into nothing but dust. Shin YuSung's hair whipped gracefully in the air from the wind pressure of the shock.

“Keeek!”

The remaining orc swung its axe around wildly, but Shin YuSung easily stopped the blow with an expressionless face.

Crack.

His palm, coated in mana, was like steel. It was not a state of power a student could feasibly attain. Using mana to strengthen one's body without the help of a Trait severely increased its consumption.

On top of that, if one wanted to focus mana on a singular part of their body to strengthen it, they had to endure bone-shatteringly harsh training to achieve it.

Shin YuSung's current strength was not due to an innate Trait, but the fruit of his efforts. The rewards of his training were greater due to this.

[Fighting monsters. Difficulty: Rank 3, five orcs have been cleared.]

Like the mechanical voice had announced, Shin YuSung had destroyed five orcs. He didn't look even a little bit winded.

Step step.

Shin YuSung left the room with a nonchalant expression on his face. The students couldn't hide their shock.

“Yu... YuSung, you...”

Lee SiWoo, who was watching, couldn't finish his sentence as his mouth was gaping wide open, flabbergasted.

“Y-you r-really won...”

Sumire, who had come from Japan to study abroad in South Korea, was someone who usually stuttered her words. Today, however, she was stuttering even more.



It was a level of fighting prowess that nobody could imagine coming from an F Class student. The instructor, Lin Xiao, gulped.

With a shocked expression, he looked at Shin YuSung and asked:

“A-a-are you really from F Class?”

At the question, Shin YuSung looked around at the F Class students. Even excluding the previously discouraged Lee SiWoo and the timid Sumire, the expressions of the other students had changed.

He gave a small smile and opened his mouth.

“Yes, I’m from the F Class.”

Shin YuSung was the singular wildcard that F Class had—their hope for the intramurals.

* * *

Gaon Academy headmaster’s office.

The newly appointed instructor, Lin Xiao, roughly shoved the door to the office aside and entered it.

“Headmaster!”

Jin ByungCheol, who was hitting his scalp with a comb* at that moment, yelled at Lin Xiao with a frigid expression.

“Goodness, Instructor Lin Xiao! Can’t you at least knock before entering?”

“I apologize! Should I at least knock right now?”

“Ugh, it’s fine. It’s fine! For what possible reason did you...?”

Jin ByungCheol asked with an indifferent expression.

Lin Xiao described in detail what had happened in the training room.

“...Then the student with the F-rank Trait beat five rank 3 monsters! And he didn’t just beat them, he destroyed them! One shot one kill! Complete blindsides! Two years just now!”

“What is ‘two years just now?’”

“My daughter just turned two years old.**”

Jin ByungCheol, who was listening to Lin Xiao’s story, rubbed his chin with a “hmm” sound.

“The name of the student is Shin YuSung, right?”

Jin ByungCheol asked this without showing any surprise. Lin Xiao nodded his head.

“Y-yesss... you are correct.”

“That sounds about right.”

“Wait, a first-year student with an F-rank Trait cleared five rank 3 monsters! This is huge news, even if it was done in an Image Room...”

As Lin Xiao worked himself up into raising his voice, Jin ByungCheol made calming hand motions and clicked his tongue.

“Whoa, whoa, please compose yourself. To think that an instructor hadn’t heard the news yet...”

At the headmaster’s frank words, Lin Xiao realized that there was something odd about Shin YuSung’s identity. It was obvious if one thought about it; an F-rank student destroying five rank 3 monsters without even breathing hard?

“Who is that student, really?” Lin Xiao asked Jin ByungCheol with a serious expression.

“Shin YuSung is...”

With a proud smile, Headmaster Jin ByungCheol continued.

“The disciple of Yu WonHak.”

“...Yu WonHak. Yu WonHak?! Are you talking about the Fist King, Yu WonHak?!”

“So he’s well-known in China too, as expected.”

Lin Xiao couldn’t hold back his incredulity at Jin ByungCheol’s words.

“Of course, what are you talking about?! And one of my parents is Korean...”

A legend in the hunter community.

Even if it was a story from twenty years ago, it was rare to see any active hunter not know the name of the Fist King, Yu WonHak.

“An expert in body strengthening, a notoriously difficult discipline! The man who has mana cultivation down to a science...”

“Yes, those are all his achievements.”

Jin ByungCheol preened while stroking his mustache. Acting as if he and Shin YuSung were close, he continued:

“And Shin YuSung is the disciple whom the essence of those achievements was poured into.”

“M-my god!”

“How strong can he become? Even as an F Class student, it’s possible for him to be in the top 10 of our student rankings. In fact, he might even reach the Seven Numbers above that!”

Jin ByungCheol squeezed his hand into a fist and let out a triumphant “yesss”.

“How great do you think the marketing is going to be around him?”

He bared his dark thoughts out into the open.

“He’s also good-looking, so slap Shin YuSung’s face in a bunch of advertisements and sell him! An academy where even an F-rank can become a member of the Seven Numbers~! Kuhahaha!”

Lin Xiao expressed his distaste at the idea as Jin ByungCheol laughed heartily.

“Headmaster really is pitch-black on the inside.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment, hmm hmm!”

Jin ByungCheol slowly walked up to the window and looked outside. He suddenly asked an unrelated question.

“I heard that instructor Lin Xiao taught the first years at Skyscraper Academy...”

The pride of China.

Skyscraper Academy. Lin Xiao taught the first-year students there. Even if he had relocated to Gaon, which had higher pay, he was an instructor held in fairly high regard at Skyscraper.

“Correct.”

“I want to ask you about one thing...”

“What is it?”

“Liú Jùn.”

At that name, Lin Xiao stiffened. Liú Jùn’s name had that much of an effect.

“...Are you talking about the disciple of the Sword God?”

The Sword God, one of the Fist King's rivals.

Their disciple, Liú Jùn, China's strongest student, was born with an S-rank Trait and had the sword skills of the Sword God passed down onto him.

“Shin YuSung and Liú Jùn; if the disciples of the Fist King and the Sword God were to fight, who would win?”

Gulp.

Lin Xiao swallowed. He was unique in the regard that he was the only person in Gaon who had seen both Shin YuSung and Liú Jùn fight.

He took a moment to think.

“Hm...”

After gathering his thoughts, Lin Xiao opened his mouth.

“In my opinion...”

Chapter 7

The greatest academy in Korea.

She was first place in Gaon's student rankings; the strongest first-year student that everyone was talking about.

Adela Ortensia entered the Image Room. Even during her free time, Adela was not one to skimp on her training.

“Location: random.”

A voice cold enough to chill someone to the bone.

Adela's face was as expressionless as a robot.

[The location has been set to the fields.]

A refreshing breeze splayed her silver locks beautifully as the holograms were constructing the location.

“Three rank 4s.”

[Fighting monsters. Difficulty: Rank 4, three centaurs.]

Zzt!

The holograms created a monster with the upper body of a human and the body of a horse. The centaurs displayed their tall height and muscular bodies that contrasted Adela's own physique.

“Grr!”

“Human! We'll destroy you!”

Even as holograms, they were very intimidating.

The Image room recreated all five senses used in combat. The ground shook as the centaurs charged.

Clop clop clop!

With an impassive gaze, Adela stretched her hand towards the floor.

Crack! Crackle!

Everything froze.

Adela was the only one who was free in her world of ice.



Snap! Snap! Shatter!

The frozen centaurs broke into pieces as if they were crafted ice sculptures.

“Weak.”

Even when she went to the strongest hunter academy in the strongest hunter country of South Korea...

“Too weak...”

Her opponents were too weak. It's why Adela felt so hollow. If Shin YuSung had only trained his body under the Fist King, Adela was a hunter that had only trained her Trait.

And her trait was S-rank.

Adela had the disposition to become the strongest hunter in the entire world, let alone Gaon Academy. Obviously, no one there could match up to her.

[You have attained a new high score.]

Adela wasn't even a little bit happy at the mechanical voice congratulating her.

[Image Room – First-year records]

[1st — Adela Ortensia]

[Three rank 4 monsters. Total: 15000 points]

When the expressionless Adela was about to close the holographic screen, she happened to see an interesting name.

[9th — Shin YuSung]

[Five rank 3 monsters. Total: 10000 points]

“...The disciple of the Fist King?”

Adela had not forgotten the sole hunter, Fist King Yu WonHak, who had defeated her grandfather. Possibly because of that, Shin YuSung's

name was swirling around in Adela's mouth.

“...Shin, YuSung.”

Even while being in F Class with an F-rank Trait, Shin YuSung had managed to get ninth place after just one day of attending classes. This was not a simple matter of skill.

While Adela's face was still expressionless, she seemed to be interested in Shin YuSung's actions.

‘If he has truly inherited the Fist King's skills... ’

With that as her reason, Adela stared at Shin YuSung's name written on the hologram for a long time.

* * *

Gathering ingredients for Potions class.

F Class was having a hands-on lesson in the forest on Gaon Academy grounds.

“...What's the difference between weeds and herbs?”

“They all look the same.”

“Ugh, the flowers... there are way too many that are the same color.”

The majority of the students were having a hard time with gathering herbs, but Shin YuSung was pointing to a red flower and chatting with Lee SiWoo in a carefree manner.

“This flower is called a Highness.”

“Wow, you found another one! So this is poisonous too?”

As Lee SiWoo asked, interested, Shin YuSung shook his head.

“Not usually. But...”

Shin YuSung mashed the Highness’s petals against the stalk of one of the plants he had gathered earlier. The two plants slowly got stickier and turned into a purple sap.

“If it combines with the stalk of a Hajid plant, it can cause serious food poisoning. It’s nearly impossible to go about your daily life when you’re sick with it.”

“Wow! Where did you learn all of this?” Lee SiWoo asked, surprised.

Shin YuSung remembered another conversation he had with the Fist King while combing through his memories.

[YuSung-ah, a hunter needs to be proficient in many fields to be a great one! Even knowing about a useless-looking herb like this one can save your life when you’re in a tight spot!]

Because the seven-year-old Shin YuSung was gathering up the herbs that the Fist King was talking about, he was running frantically all over the mountain. Due to his training back then, Shin YuSung gained enough knowledge about herbs and poisonous plants to rival the students in the graduating class.

“I learned it from my master.”

“Y-your master, you mean...! The Fist King, Yu WonHak?! That’s amazing!”

Lee SiWoo’s eyes were shining with excitement. The students watching the two being friendly with each other were whispering amongst themselves.

“He seems nicer than the rumors?”

“Hey, haven’t you heard about the Demon of the Arena? Ju HaJin in D class goes into convulsions after just hearing Shin YuSung’s name! How brutally did he beat him down for that to happen?”

“Enough to kill him...”

Shin YuSung’s classmates all had the same question: Why was Lee SiWoo fine? Why was he getting along with the other boy? One student who was looking at both Shin YuSung and Lee SiWoo creased their forehead and mumbled:

“...Maybe he’s safe because he’s cute? There are a lot of people who have a soft spot for cute things, after all.”

Sumire, who was listening in on the conversation, wrote something down in her notebook.

[Note! Shin YuSung is weak to cute guys!]

TL/N: Good for him kekw

Sumire hadn’t noticed that ‘cute things’ had been changed to ‘cute guys’. Of course, the party involved, Shin YuSung, was having a conversation with Lee SiWoo without knowing that weird rumors—alongside his nickname as the Demon of the Arena—were spreading.

“Master taught me a variety of things outside of combat.”

“To think that Fist King-nim* personally taught you all these things...”

Lee SiWoo got excited about it as if he was the one being taught. Grinning widely, he asked:

“Oh, right, YuSung-ah! Are you done preparing for the exam?”

“...The exam?”

Shin YuSung remembered Headmaster Jin ByungCheol’s words. He had definitely said something to that effect relating to his student rankings.

‘Come to think of it, he told me that he would move me to a nicer dorm if I was higher in the rankings.’

Of course, the dorms weren't hugely important to Shin YuSung. Compared to the days of old when he was sleeping in caves while being pelted with wind and rain, his current dorm room was practically a hotel room.

'If I had to point out an issue, it wouldn't be the dorms, but things outside the academy...'

Students placed low on the student rankings were subject to many penalties from the academy; they were also restricted from participating in events outside of the school—his current grades were important for his hunter career after graduating.

'If I want to pursue the title of the strongest hunter, like Master, having good grades at the Academy is a must.'

As a matter of fact, the Fist King had been a representative in the International Competition during his academy days. He had eventually claimed victory over a large variety of opponents and had raised South Korea's position in the world.

This feat was a part of the reason why he was called a legend in the hunter community.

Lee SiWoo laughed in a joking manner at Shin YuSung, who had fallen deep into thought.

"Oh, don't worry too much about it! There's a bit of luck in which opponent you'll get, but with your skills, you'll definitely earn a good score!"

"The other students all know what's going to happen during the exam?"

"Hm... nothing for sure, but we've pretty much done the same thing every time. They always tell you who your partner for the exam is a day before the test, and the contents are pretty similar as well."

Shin YuSung showed disapproval at the word 'partner'. The Fist King had constantly emphasized the strength of hunters—but, at the very least, he could say that the students in F Class seemed very far away

from being classified as strong.

“A partner...”

Usually, for the exam, the student with the highest amount of skill was paired with the student with the least skill in the same class. Shin YuSung was someone with a standout level of skill in F Class, so the student with the lowest grades was naturally his partner.

Excluding Shin YuSung, who did not have a ranking yet, the student in Gaon Academy who was 209th place out of 209 students in the student rankings was Hanajima Sumire. The girl in question was stealing glances at Shin YuSung while muttering:

“P-partner...”

* * *

8 PM. It was too early to sleep.

Shin YuSung entered his dorm and sat on a worn chair.

Creek.

On the other side of the glass, one could see Gaon Academy’s grounds. Rain was pouring mercilessly, drenching the entire world.

“...Rain.”

Shin YuSung thought back to a memory of when he was five years old.

Rain was pouring just as hard back, but what made him feel cold inside back then wasn’t the rain pelting his body.

[You won’t survive in the ShinOh family with an F-rank Trait, anyways.]

Shin Yu-sung still remembered those cold eyes—a gaze that chilled you to the bone—looking at him like he was useless; it was not a gaze

one usually aimed at their own child. Shin YuSung's father left after those parting words without even looking behind him.

His mother had brought a large sum of money in a backpack to the orphanage, putting it in the director's hands as a show of dismissal of her son.

[He might be better off if he gave up on being a hunter and lived an ordinary life.]

The ShinOh family could tolerate a child who didn't have any powers, but they could not tolerate someone as disgraceful as a child with an F-rank Trait. A person could have their Trait examined when they turned five. After he was examined, Shin YuSung was abandoned.

But it was different with the Fist King.

Yu WonHak said this to Shin YuSung the first day that he had met him.

[Pipsqueak! You were born with incredible talent!]

To Shin YuSung, who had been abandoned by his parents for having an F-rank Trait, he laughed heartily and added:

[Why don't you be my disciple and try to become the greatest hunter in the world?]

Even though it wasn't raining that day, fat raindrops were splashing on Shin YuSung's feet. He was five years old. Ironically, Shin YuSung was thrown away because of his lack of talent and also chosen for having talent.

“...The ShinOh family.”

Shin YuSung, who was deeply reminiscing about the past, spoke to himself. He slowly opened the glass door to the veranda.

Splashhhhhh!

It was a downpour.

Of course, the Shin YuSung of five years old was different from the current Shin YuSung. He wasn't a member of the ShinOh family, nor the child abandoned at the orphanage.

"I am..."

Shin YuSung was the only disciple of the Fist King.

He was a full-fledged hunter who was pursuing the title of the strongest. The ShinOh family who had cast him aside and the Fist King who had brought him in. Shin YuSung wanted to prove himself through his existence to the world that had persecuted hunters through the rank system.

"I will become the strongest."

Gaon Academy was nothing but a step towards achieving that goal for Shin YuSung.

Chapter 8

Hanajima Sumire.

Even amongst F Class, she was the student with the worst grades in the student rankings. Pale skin and bangs hid her face. Her gloomy appearance and personality, however, drew attention.

“U-um, e-excuse... S-sorry... A-a moment...”

Sumire approached the notice board while constantly apologizing and dodging between the students.

“Ohh, I’m in the same party as a member of the Seven Numbers!”

“Lucky! If you’re in A Class, it’s Kim EunAh? Talk about a totally different level!”

“Ugh, why are they making us take the exam with partners? It’s so unfair!”

“Why, why? Who’d you get?”

The students all had different reactions.

Even if they were from the same class, their skill levels and teamwork synchronization skills were incredibly varied. Gaon Academy implemented partners in some of its exams in an effort to teach teamwork, but there were a lot of mixed feelings when partners were announced for the exams due to this.

‘My partner is... ’

Sumire carefully scanned the list with her index finger to find her partner. It wasn’t easy to do since students were pushing her around left and right.

‘...Your partner is someone from the same class. Their skills should even yours out.’

This was how partners were widely known to be chosen in Gaon. The problem was that—even knowing this—no one could guarantee which partner would be assigned to who until the list was released.

Sumire was laid flat on the wall because of the wave of students shoving her against it, but she pushed through it to find her partner.

[Rank 209 – Hanajima Sumire]

“208, 209... Ah, found it...”

Sumire happily tried to read the name of her partner.

“Hey, how much time are you gonna take just for yourself? Move it!”

Right then, a female student shoved Sumire away.

“Ah, uuu... I-I’m sorry!”

Sumire, who had ended up sitting on the ground, carefully stood up while being mindful of those around her. She wanted to raise her student ranking more than anyone else.

‘My partner is... ’

To Sumire, this exam was life or death. Even while being shoved around here and there, Sumire leaned against the wall and checked the name of her partner.

[Partner – Shin YuSung]

She had hit the jackpot.

* * *

Inside the Gaon Academy forest.

Lee SiWoo ran at an amazing speed towards Shin YuSung, who had been in the middle of training.

“YuSung-ah! YuSung-ah! Huff, huff!”

He had ran so much that he was struggling to breathe. After quickly catching his breath, Lee SiWoo asked:

“YuSung-ah! Did you check who your partner was?”

“Nope.”

“Your partner is Sumire! Hanajima Sumire!”

At those words, Shin YuSung opened his eyes from his meditation. He slowly stood up and looked at Lee SiWoo.

“...Sumire?”

Shin YuSung did not remember who Sumire was, especially because she didn't perform very well—even among the F Class students. Lee SiWoo explained it to Shin YuSung with a serious face.

“For real, her Trait is Necromancer, but she can only summon one skeleton! She loses to rank 1 monsters in the Image Room! She's last place in the student rankings! The weakest student in our school!”

Lee SiWoo said these things because he was worried for Shin YuSung in his own way. But in actuality, the subject in question was composed.

“It doesn't matter.”

“What do you mean it doesn't matter? Your partner is super important for your exam!” Lee SiWoo shot back.

“Is Sumire the one with her bangs lowered?” Shin YuSung asked with a calm expression.

“Oh, you remember! Yeah, yeah! You can feel a gloomy aura just by looking at her...”

At Lee SiWoo’s words, Shin YuSung shook his head and pointed behind him.

“...Um, it’s not that I remembered her, but that she’s standing right behind you.”

Gulp.

Lee SiWoo swallowed and turned around. Predictably, a tearful Sumire was looking at Shin YuSung and Lee SiWoo.

Sob.

“uuu, uuu... I’m sorry! I can only summon one skeleton... and I can’t even defeat one rank 1 monster even though I’m a hunter... uuu... I’m sorry I’m your partner!”



As Sumire repeatedly bowed her head and apologized, Lee SiWoo started sweating, then ran away.

“I’m sorry!”

As a result, Shin YuSung ended up being the one having to deal with Sumire.

“Uuu... to think someone like me... b-became the partner of Fist King’s disciple... just to drag him down...”

Sumire’s self-confidence was digging a hole and burrowing underneath the ground. Shin YuSung had no choice but to comfort her.

“...Um, please calm down for now, Sumire.”

“Uuu...”

The two sat on a tree stump.

* * *

After some time, Sumire managed to regain control of herself. She started to talk about her story with a calmer voice than before.

“...I didn’t think I would be this weak from the start, either. I was still average in the academy I went to in Japan.”

“...Er, I see.”

Shin YuSung’s expression showed that he had no interest in Sumire’s backstory, but it seemed like just talking about it was enough to comfort her.

“I’m not very skilled, and the students in Gaon are so much stronger than the ones in Japan...”

Sumire could endure being ignored by her peers or living in a dormitory that sometimes had rats. However, her biggest problem was her grant.

As a prestigious academy, Gaon received grants from a number of corporations. Grants were distributed according to the students' grades. It was chump change to those from a chaebol* family, but to a student who wasn't very well off like Sumire, it was a large sum of money.

"Even though I need to raise my student rankings... my Trait is F-rank, and I'm this weak..."

Shin YuSung was interested when the topic of her Trait came up.

"Hm, what is your Trait, exactly?"

To get high grades for the exam, he needed to show Sumire some care.

"Um, my ability? Ah, i-it's nothing much... I can use a hair or a fingernail... to summon a skeleton..."

As Sumire started to explain it while stuttering, Shin YuSung quickly cut her off.

"I'd like to see it instead of an explanation."

After twiddling her fingers for a while, Sumire stood up as if determined. She pulled out one of her hairs and sprinkled it on the ground.

R-riip!

From the earth, a grotesque skeleton crawled out. But the skeleton's posture was a little weird.

Its embarrassed pose, despite it being nothing than a bunch of bones, was exactly like Sumire's.

"S-skeleton, there! That tree... no, attack... the tree!"

"...Clack, clack clack!"

At her command, the skeleton ran towards the tree and threw a punch.

Clack! Rattle rattle.

As soon as it hit the tree, the skeleton broke into pieces.

“My god...”

Shin YuSung couldn't say anything to that.

Sumire sat back down on the tree stump, depressed. She started lamenting her circumstances.

“I think... the skeletons I make resemble the owner of the hair I use... and without my summoning powers, I'm clumsy and can't fight...”

She mumbled and started burrowing her self-confidence again. Shin YuSung offered one of his hairs that had happened to fall on the ground to her.

“Do you want to try making one with my hair?”

“I-is that okay with you? Everyone else told me that they... feel grossed out by the idea... They can't help but feel bad about the idea of their hair turning into a skeleton...”

When she started rambling again, Shin YuSung interjected another time.

“Go ahead.”

Sumire nodded and sprinkled Shin YuSung's hair on the ground. Like last time, a skeleton crawled out. But the shape of its bones were completely different from the previous skeleton.

“Clack, clack!”

The skeleton confidently hit its jawbone and got into Shin YuSung's

fighting stance.

“H-huh?”

Sensing something was different, Sumire dubiously gave a command to the skeleton.

“...A-attack the tree!”

Boom!

The skeleton hit the tree energetically.

Sumire’s skeletons could replicate about three-tenths of the physical capabilities of the owner of the hair. Of course, with a skeleton created using Sumire’s hair, someone who was physically weak would produce a weak skeleton as well.

And now.

The skeleton was newly reborn through Shin YuSung’s hair.

Bam! Snap!

As the skeleton hit the tree with a bony fist, the tree made a large sound and started to lean in one direction.

Boom!

The tree created a gust of wind as it fell down. Sumire, who had been watching all of this with a gobsmacked expression, suddenly stood up.”

“うそ! (No way!)”

She was so shocked that she reverted back to her mother tongue. She looked from the skeleton to Shin YuSung, then back.

“That’s not bad at all?”

The reaction from the owner of the hair, Shin YuSung, was light. While staring at the skeleton, Sumire thought:

‘I-if I’m paired up with this person... ’

If she was paired up with Shin YuSung, Sumire’s dream to raise her student rankings wasn’t a dream anymore. As luck would have it, Sumire was Shin YuSung’s partner for the exam.

‘I can do this!’

Sumire, excited by her own power, uncharacteristically grabbed both of Shin YuSung’s hands. Her eyes were sparkling.

“I-if you don’t mind? I’m sorry, but can I have about 10 of your hairs!?”

Shin YuSung had been paired with an oddball from his first exam.

* * *

At around the same time, the A Class student who had been watching Sumire from the 3rd floor of the main building ran towards their classroom with a surprised expression on their face.

“Hey, everyone! Breaking news!”

But they were unlucky.

Kim EunAh, who had returned from her extracurricular activities, was sitting on a desk instead of a chair and posturing.

“...So loud. What are you making a racket about in the morning?”

Kim EunAh was as touchy as always. Even among the A Class students, who were strong in their own right, she had a history of having a bad reputation. She had an electricity Trait that was impossible to deal with, and she was 2nd place in the student rankings. The students in A Class never took a break from trying to

stay on her good side.

“Ah, it’s Shin YuSung...”

“...Shin YuSung? Who’s that?”

Because she had not been at school for three days due to her extracurriculars, Kim EunAh didn’t know about the existence of Shin YuSung. As she frowned, the student next to her quickly explained it.

“Um, he’s a new student who enrolled in F Class. He’s the disciple of the Fist King...”

“Hah?”

Kim Eun-ah snorted and swung her legs. It was interesting enough that the Fist King’s disciple enrolled in the Academy, but his Trait was F-rank, as well?

Hop.

Kim Eun-ah, who had jumped off the desk, summoned electricity on top of her palm.

Zzt! Zzzt!

“Good timing. Tomorrow’s the exam, right?”

And she gave a playful smile.

It seemed like Kim EunAh had gotten properly interested in Shin YuSung.

*Chaebol are Korean conglomerates that are monopolized by one family. Examples in real life are Samsung or Hyundai.

Chapter 9

K Channel's 'billboard' reporter, Yu HanNah.

She made a beeline for the first-year F class while bringing her large cameraman along.

"I told you that it was a huge scoop back then, right?"

"Um, y-you did. But the producer told us to film the graduating year first..."

"Oh No! I'll be the one deciding the order! If he doesn't like it, tell him to splice the footage."

Yu HanNah was the main anchor of the news station and the one with the last word. Even if she was eccentric, she had a good eye for news, so everyone pretended to look the other way.

As if in a good mood, Yu HanNah laughed, "fufu!" and showed her phone screen to the cameraman.

"Look at the comments on the video. He definitely has some sort of innate star quality!"

—Wow, K Channel's Academy feature was sick... especially the Fist King disciple!

—Does he really have an F-rank Trait with those skills? Is his opponent even alive brr

—What the hell is up with God YuSung's looks...? I just learned abt this great program sadge

An endless stream of viewer comments.

In just one day, the video of Shin YuSung's spar had reached 280,000 likes. Of course, the number of views was currently several times that. Current ratings were 6% as well.

K Channel and Yu HanNah appreciated Shin YuSung's star quality.

"...There's a kind of, 'wham!' feeling from him. An F-rank Trait hunter defeating other hunters with high rank Traits!"

Yu HanNah shouted this towards the cameraman and made a fist.

"On top of that, the disciple of the Fist King who had suddenly announced his retirement! And, gasp! He's super handsome! Enough for people to make a fuss about it!"

"Interviewing the graduating class? Phoo. I'm absolutely going to interview Shin YuSung. Okay?" She asked the cameraman a question she already had an answer to.

"O-okay."

Right when the cameraman had finished responding, someone was trying to enter the classroom for F Class.

"Oh~ wait wait! Excuse me, cute student over there~ are you okay for an interview?"

Regardless of the answer, Yu HanNah caught the student. The female student who was sweating and trying to discreetly avoid Yu HanNah's eyes was none other than Shin YuSung's partner, Sumire.

"Huh? C-cute? I'm not that cute... everyone says I'm gloomy and depressing... and I can't even speak all that well..."

Yu HanNah tried approaching her amicably even as Sumire's face became paler and she tried to back away.

"Don't be like that! It's a really short question. You know the Fist King's disciple from the same class, right?"

“Eh?... S-Shin YuSung-ssi*?”

Yu HanNah nodded at Sumire’s cautious response.

“Yes! Can you give me just one sentence! About what kind of student Shin YuSung is?”

“Um, b-but I don’t really know anyth...”

“Just say anything, don’t worry too much~ it’s fine even if it’s something superficial!”

“B-but still... oh, oh right!”

Sumire recalled what she had written in her notebook after seeing Shin YuSung get along with Lee SiWoo.

“Shin YuSung-ssi just... gets along very well with others.”

At her careful reply, Yu HanNah mumbled with a blank face:

“Hm, is that so?”

Yu HanNah was wearing an indifferent expression.

‘What a boring answer.’

It seemed like she wasn’t a fan of Sumire’s reply.

‘Isn’t there a way to make this a scoop... ’

* * *

Shin YuSung and Lee SiWoo were practicing for the exam in their own ways.

Lee SiWoo, whose weapon was a bow, aimed at the target and drew the bowstring. He had an uncharacteristically serious expression on

his face. Lee SiWoo carefully controlled everything down to his breathing and, to not lose concentration, let go of the bowstring.

Whoosh! Snk.

The arrow hit the bullseye of the target.

“Woohoo! Yes! 10 points!”

While Lee SiWoo was happily hopping around, Shin YuSung—who seemed to have his interest pique —grabbed a pebble that was next to him. The distance between the target and Shin YuSung was around 100 meters. Shin YuSung briefly took a stance and, without aiming, lobbed the pebble.

Whoosh! Boom!

The target broke into pieces from the shockwave. Due to this, Shin YuSung’s score couldn’t be gauged.

“W-wow, you hit the target with a rock? You’re really...”

Lee SiWoo looked at him with an awed expression. Shin YuSung humbly replied:

“I was lucky.”

“I-is that so?”

Lee SiWoo went “hmm,” and fell into thought for a moment. He started muttering words mixed with praise for Shin YuSung.

“Hm, even still it’s unbelievable. To think you have to take the exam with the lower-rank classes...”

“Lower rank classes?”

“That’s what we call C Class, D Class, E Class and F Class all together.”

As Lee SiWoo had said, the exam was being held by first splitting the classes in half. C Class, D Class, E Class and F Class took their exams together while S Class, A Class and B Class—the 3 upper rank classes—took theirs together.

“It’s a huge advantage for us! Even when they split the classes like that, our test scores are kept as-is!”

Lee SiWoo had been shooting arrows for over an hour and was tired. He eventually wiped the sweat running from his forehead and sat down on a wide, flat boulder.

“Phew! I can’t train anymore.”

Voom! Fwt!

Shin YuSung performed a picture-perfect punch. Lee SiWoo watched him do so in amazement and opened his mouth.

“YuSung-ah, as expected your goal is the Seven Numbers, right?”

Seven Numbers.

A title given to the seven students with the highest student rankings per grade in the school. Lee SiWoo thought that Shin YuSung was the only individual in F Class who could try to be a Seven Number. Of course, to Shin YuSung, becoming a Seven Number was nothing put a part of the process. It wasn’t important to him how strong the students at Gaon Academy were; the moment that he had become the disciple of the Fist King, Shin YuSung’s goal had always been to become the strongest hunter.

This was his way of repaying the Fist King who had taken him in, and a unique form of revenge for the Shin-oh family who had abandoned him.

One deep breath.

Shin YuSung released his posture, and, remembering what the headmaster had told him, asked Lee SiWoo:

“Why is everyone so focused on becoming a member of the Seven Numbers?”

“Our school, you see~ treats you differently depending on your skills. If you become a part of the Seven Numbers, your dorm room is super fancy~ and they give you grants, and...”

Lee SiWoo beamed while looking at Shin YuSung’s face.

“You can participate in all of the difficult extracurricular activities as well. It’s great for getting your name out there.”

“So prominence is key.”

“Yep!”

Lee SiWoo nodded his head, then added more to his explanation.

“If you want to be selected by the voters, you have to at least be one of the Seven Numbers.”

“Then, I’ll have to raise my student ranking first,” Shin YuSung replied calmly.

If he wanted to become the strongest hunter, he should definitely be able to achieve something like becoming a member of the Seven Numbers.

“Heh~ it’s because of the facilities, right? No matter how you put it, the lower rank dorms are...”

“No. It’s because of my goal. I want to become the strongest hunter in the world.”

Lee SiWoo seemed surprised at Shin YuSung’s aspirations. The world was vast, and there were a lot of strong hunters. Even if Shin YuSung was the disciple of the Fist King, becoming the strongest hunter was a completely different story. Because of that fact, the Fist King had always told Shin YuSung to keep moving forward with a modest heart. Those were not empty words meant only to scare him.

“A-are you saying that you’re going to win against all of the hunters in the world?! Even the disciple of the Sword God from Skyscraper Academy?!”

Like the disciple of the Sword God that Lee SiWoo had mentioned, there were a large number of academies and highly skilled students all around the world. Those students having been born with talent was a given, and they also put in a lot of effort in improving themselves.

“The disciple of the Sword God?”

Sin YuSung unearthed a hazy memory.

[...Especially among them, the Sword God! He was the most annoying! Stubborn and inflexible, and with the same amount of skill as me!]

The Sword God was a hunter that Shin YuSung’s master, Yu WonHak, had talked about until his lips had worn down.

“The Sword God has a disciple as well?”

Interested, Shin YuSung asked Lee SiWoo, who nodded his head.

“Ho, you didn’t know about Liú Jùn? There’s no way you haven’t heard about him, unless you were living somewhere up in the mountains...”

The Sword God’s disciple, Liú Jùn, was that famous. His incredible reputation had spread throughout China and had even reached South Korea.

“...So his name is Liú Jùn?”

Shin YuSung repeatedly etched the name into his mind in an effort to remember it. Liú Jùn was definitely one of the strong hunters that his master, the Fist King, had warned him about.

‘Liú Jùn... ’

Right then, someone panting and gasping ran towards the two from the direction of the Academy.

“Huff, huff! I finally found you! Shin YuSung! Wow! Why are the grounds so freaking large? It took me so long!”

That someone was K Channel’s Yu HanNah. After concluding her interview with Sumire, she had been searching for Shin YuSung all this time. After catching her breath, she pointed the mic towards him.

“Now, now, student Shin YuSung? We’re going to be doing a short interview with you. Wait, are you even listening to me?”

Yu HanNah sideeyed the cameraman, then asked the question that she had prepared.

“Is there a hunter that you, as the disciple of the Fist King, are concerned about?”

At her question, Shin YuSung mumbled a name as if he was ruminating on it.

“...Liú Jùn.”

Heavyset eyes.

A faint voice, as if he had waited a thousand years to say this. Shin YuSung had a far-off look in his eyes, as he was deep in thought. Liú Jùn was the disciple of his master’s acknowledged comrade, the Sword God.

“...That person is the most worrisome to me.”

“Hm~ so, do you have any goals as a hunter after you graduate and go off into the world?”

“My goal is to become the strongest hunter on Earth.”

Yu HanNah went “mhm,” and nodded her head at Shin YuSung’s

adamant reply.

‘There’s a lot of nuance to this if I use the right angle for it.’

K Channel’s pride and joy, the devil’s editing that could make even an angel look evil. Anticipating a success, Yu HanNah laughed wickedly.

* * *

China’s pride and joy, Skyscraper Academy.

The gigantic 100-floor building was installed with cutting-edge techniques for the development of its students.

Even in China, there was a man who was far and away the top contender for the strongest student out of the first years.

The Sword God’s disciple, Liú Jùn (刘俊).

He swept back his sweat-soaked bangs after finishing his training regime that was on par with an active hunter’s.

As he did so, Liú Jùn’s face, which had been covered by his hair, naturally relaxed. Thick eyebrows and cool eyes, and a lonely atmosphere that brought the two together.

Plip.

A bead of sweat snaked down Liú Jùn’s sharp jawline and dripped onto the floor.

“What business do you have with me?”

Liú Jùn asked this with a displeased expression, and his frigid voice rang coldly throughout the training area.

As he did so, a female student who was grinning ear to ear walked out from behind a pillar.

“Oh~ you knew I was there? I was waiting there to try and surprise you.”

“...I asked you what business you had with me,” Liú Jùn asked in an annoyed tone.

The female student grinned as if she had found something funny and offered him a Korean newspaper.

“Why don’t you see for yourself?”

Unlike the female student who had come from Korea, Liú Jùn was fluent in Korean despite being from China. This was due to China choosing Korean, a mecca for strong hunters, as its second language.

Rustle.

Liú Jùn had no other choice; he opened the paper that the female student had given him.

[K Channel Shin YuSung! Exclusive interview!]

[Fist King’s disciple! Impressions revealed!]

[Sword God’s disciple is the most worrisome!]

[Announced his resolve! He will win against everyone to become the strongest!]

Liú Jùn, who was reading the newspaper expressionlessly, creased his brow. Liú Jùn was the pupil of the greatest hunter in China, the Sword God. He had never been provoked by a hunter from another country.

That was because he had overwhelmed everyone with his unprecedented skills. At the provocation of a newcomer like Shin YuSung, Liú Jùn mumbled in a cold voice:

“这小子于嘛呢? (Who is this kid?)”

It really was a strong first impression.



*-ssi is an honorific used to refer formally to someone, usually of a higher status. In this case, Sumire is being just a little bit too formal.

Chapter 10

A gigantic luxury cruise.

The cruise liner was cutting through the ocean on its way towards the testing grounds, Jewel Island. The first years of Gaon Academy had forgotten about the test in the face of the beautiful scenery, and an amicable air had sprung out of the freeing atmosphere.

And among those students was the strongest member of S Class and first in the student rankings, Adela.

‘Refreshing.’

Adela was feeling the cool breeze while leaning against the handrails of the cruise line. The wind lifted her silver locks into the air. Even Adela, who felt stifled by her life in the Academy, felt freedom at that moment.

“Hey, what’re you doing? With that cheeky, fulfilled expression on your face, no less.”

Kim EunAh leaned her face towards Adela while standing right next to her. When Adela didn’t give her a response, Kim EunAh ended up talking into her ear.

“Can’t you hear me? What are you doing?”

Adela made a face at Kim EunAh and walked away. Kim EunAh started to follow her around like a puppy.

“Hey~ let’s fight. There’s a sparring area on the cruise ship, did you know?”

As if annoyed by Kim EunAh, Adela clicked her tongue and said:

“It’s only been three days.”

“Since what?”

“...Since you lost.”

Adela kept dismissing Kim EunAh’s invitation.

“Huh? Hey, wait, where are you going! Fight me!”

Kim EunAh ended up blocking Adela’s path.

“Agh! Please! Let’s fight just one time!”

An earnestly pleading Kim EunAh.

“I don’t want to.”

Of course, Adela refused her again.

“Ugh, really! Just once!”

Adela glared as Kim EunAh blocked her path again.

“...Why are you so persistent?”

“I told you! I can’t just go on with my life knowing that I lost.”

It was when Kim EunAh grinned that Lee SiWoo’s voice was heard ringing out loud from below them.

“Wow! The ocean is so cool!”

But the person Adela’s gaze was drawn towards was not Lee SiWoo, but Shin YuSung next to him.

“That man is...”

When Adela started to show interest in him, Kim EunAh glared and sneered.

“Ah, it’s him, right?”

She dragged Shin YuSung into the conversation to get a reaction out of Adela.

“The only disciple of the man who defeated your grandfather, the incredible~ Fist King!”

Shin YuSung, who was in F Class, was taking the exam with the so-called lower rank classes — C, D, E, and F Class.

This meant that S Class Adela and A Class Kim Eun-ah wouldn’t be making any contact with him during the exam.

Thus, he was an opponent that neither had the chance to face off against. Kim Eun-ah, as if disappointed, muttered under her breath while staring at Shin YuSung.

“I want to fight against him, too. The Fist King’s disciple must be really strong, right?”

“...Focus on your exam.”

Adela tried to end the conversation, but Kim Eun-ah smiled cheekily and tried to provoke her even more.

“Huh, why?... Because Gaon’s 1st place could change? It could happen, who knows?”

Unfazed, Adela gave a relaxed smile.

“Then you would come in third.”

Adela used those words to mark the end of the conversation and walked away. Kim EunAh huffed while glaring at Adela’s back.

“Why, that little!”

Whenever Kim EunAh got angry, sparks flew around her as if to reflect her mood.



“Tch! All that did was spoil my mood.”

Kim EunAh stared at Shin YuSung on the lower floor while upset. The

man that her rival, Adela had taken an interest in. Slowly, a playful grin grew on her face.

“...Maybe I should steal him away?”

* * *

After boarding the cruise boat, Lee SiWoo had stuck close to Shin YuSung and started chatting without stopping.

“Wow, this is kind of scary. YuSung-ah, aren’t you afraid?”

“Not really.”

“But, YuSung-ah! Your partner is Sumire!”

Lee SiWoo glanced around to check if Sumire was in the vicinity, then continued in an excited voice.

“I didn’t finish explaining last time, but... if you keep being close to her, bad things keep happening...”

As he was trying to scare Shin YuSung, somehow, Sumire had arrived and was muttering while emitting a gloomy aura.

“T-they dooon’t...”

“Urk.”

Lee SiWoo clutched his stomach at Sumire’s sudden appearance.

“Um, YuSung-ah. My stomach is hurting a lot, suddenly...”

Lee SiWoo swiftly ran away. A silence flowed between the two for a moment. Even during the awkward atmosphere, Sumire had managed to subtly sit herself down next to Shin YuSung. She began to lament again under her breath.

“...I’ve been used to those rumors for a while. People called me

offputting back in Japan as well... once, I showed my friend my skeleton summoning technique, and she said, "Kyah! A skeleton made from my hair? That's disgusting!"..."

"...Oh, I see."

Shin YuSung listened to her story.

Sumire, as if comforted, continued to wax poetic about her past.

"But even so... the skeletons are offputting, but, it's not like I was cursed, or that I'm possessed! I'm not..."

"Hm, yes, nothing suggests either of those had happened to you."

"Right? So... even if Shin YuSung-ssi stays next to me... you won't fall ill, or get into an accident, or have a ghost latch onto you, or die..."

Sumire sniffled and kept mumbling.

"I don't care about any of that," Shin YuSung said with a stern voice.

Sumire widened her eyes, as if touched, and stared at Shin YuSung.

"Y-you're the first person to ever say that to me... Actually, even my parents looked at my skeletons and said, 'I've never seen such a repulsive Trait before!', and were incredibly disgusted with me. So Iii..."

As Sumire tried to say more in her moved state, Shin YuSung covered her mouth.

"Stop. Sumire, from now on, focus only on the exam."

Sumire's mouth was covered by Shin YuSung's hand, so she moved her head up and down to show that she understood.

"Mmph mmph!"

“C-can I really do this?” Sumire timidly asked Shin YuSung, as if she had no confidence.

Even though she had nodded before. Shin YuSung looked down at Sumire and nodded without putting too much thought into it.

“You can.”

Shin YuSung pulled out a few of his hairs and put them in her hand.

“During the exam, feel free to use as many of my hairs as you’d like.”

Sumire stared at Shin YuSung’s hairs like they were a treasure.

“Wow... Shin YuSung-ssi’s hair! And five strands of them!”

She carefully wrapped the hairs in a napkin and put them in her pocket. Afterward, she looked at Shin YuSung’s hands and carefully asked:

“N-next time... can you give me your fingernails, as well? My summoning is a bit stronger with them than with hair!”

Shin YuSung gave a reluctant smile as Sumire aimed her sparkling eyes towards his fingernails.

“...I’ll think about it.”

* * *

The instructor in charge of the first-year lower rank classes.

Lin Xiao. He shouted at the students:

“Your time limit is just two hours! During that time, collect as many jewels on Jewel Island as you can!”

That was the testing location, Jewel Island.

There were a variety of monsters on that island like the carbuncle, baby salamanders, and jewel snakes. The one thing all of the monsters had in common was that they had a jewel embedded somewhere on their body.

“On this island, the monsters with higher ranks have bigger jewels! Of course, you’ll get more points if you defeat higher rank monsters, right?”

After finishing his explanation of the exam, Lin Xiao gave one last request to the students.

“I, as the instructor, understand that the further you go along in your exam, the more intense you’ll get. However, this isn’t a sparring test! Don’t fight with each other! If you break this rule, you’re getting kicked out of the academy!”

As he ended, the students immediately dispersed. The K Channel staff that had been riding on board the cruise with them were setting up a booth for Yu HanNah.

Instructor Lin Xiao started to throw barbed words at this scene as it was something he had never seen before.

“I know that hunter programs are popular, but... broadcasting the students’ exams?”

Yu HanNah shook her head and her index finger at his face.

“Oh~ my god! That sort of old-fashioned or anachronistic thinking is a complete No!”

She tilted her sunglasses down and smirked.

“This item is the fantastic~ brainchild of K Channel’s one and only head producer. The headmaster also approved of the filming! So this is all a complete No problem! Understand?”

“I-I understand.”

Lin Xiao was displeased but responded that it was fine for the moment. This was because the headmaster, Jin ByungCheol, had asked him to not cross Yu HanNah.

“What kind of Korean uses English like... what a weird woman.”

Yu HanNah was already sitting at her booth, befitting her status as the main anchor. She was personally checking if everything was ready for the broadcast.

“Have you released all of the drone cameras?”

“Don’t worry. We have so much manpower here that fifty people alone are controlling the drones.”

The male staff member assured her while thumping his chest. Yu HanNah nodded while peering into a mirror.

“Good. Shin YuSung is a must, and his partner, um... what was her name? In any case, that Japanese girl. Make sure to stick a drone camera on her.”

“Sumire?”

“Yeah, yeah. All of the footage we film is going to be edited then broadcasted, anyways, so take as much as possible. Overlay my commentary wherever it fits. Okay, if you’re ready, let’s hurry and film GO~!”

Fifty monitors were installed outdoors.

The amount of preparation K Channel had put into this broadcast exceeded the imagination. It meant that Shin YuSung was just that popular and that the news station had hopes that were that high.

* * *

Whirrr!

Shin YuSung stared at the drone camera in the sky.

‘I know it’s important for a hunter to stick out, but...’

He was a little embarrassed that everything was being broadcast, including the Academy exam. But, in order to pursue the title of the strongest hunter like the Fist King, having prominence was the most basic of basics.

‘...I have to endure at least this much.’

Shin YuSung awakened his senses and calculated which direction the wind was blowing towards with the tips of his fingers.

[YuSung-ah! If you want to catch a monster in the wild, especially the weak ones, you need to be downwind of the prey—then you’ll gobble them up! Whether it’s an animal or a monster, the weaker they are, the more sensitive they are to smells!]

This was the hunting method that the Fist King had taught him. Shin YuSung walked forward in the direction where the wind was hitting him directly. While doing so, he made sure to keep track of footprints left behind by prey in the dirt.

‘...There’s traces of something passing by. It hasn’t been long since these were made.’

The forest’s distinctive wet soil had some sort of long marks in it. Shin YuSung moved quickly, following the marks. At the end of the markings, Shin YuSung found a large snake.

‘Found it.’

The identity of the snake was the gem snake.

As a rank 3 monster, a regular F Class student had no chance of defeating it by themselves.

“Hs! Hssss!”

The gem snake, who had belatedly noticed Shin YuSung, stuck out its tongue and began to observe him. The gem snake moved slowly towards Shin YuSung while upright to attack him.

Soon after, the gem snake coiled its long body like a spring. Shin YuSung narrowed his eyes.

‘It’s coming.’

Wsh!

The gem snake threw its body along with a hair-raising cry. Shin YuSung, who had not been in any sort of stance, grabbed the neck of the gem snake in an instant.

Squeeze! Snap!

The sound of muscles snapping under incredible strength.

The gem snake’s body became limp. Shin YuSung laid the snake down and pulled out the jewel from its skull like nothing had happened.

Let alone the combat ability to overpower a rank 3.

It was rare to see first years with the ability to be this calm even in the middle of a fight. But, Shin YuSung had easily done both.

‘...Is killing monsters like this really the exam?’

This was the location where both Shin YuSung’s F Class and the upper-rank classes, like S Class, took their exam. But the difficulty was much too low for him.

‘It’s too easy to even call it easy... ’

But the reality was different from Shin YuSung’s thoughts. The monsters weren’t weak; he was just strong.

A member of F Class with an F-rank Trait.

But Shin YuSung had an innately powerful physique and body. Coupled with the Fist King's harsh training, Shin YuSung had been reborn as an irregular hunter who threatened to take the title of the strongest.

Chapter 11

The peaceful forest of Jewel Island.

Renia, a female student from F class, was crouching down to match eye levels with a carbuncle.

“C... cute!”

With glistening, bright eyes and looks resembling both a rabbit and a kitten, the carbuncle had all the requirements to look absolutely adorable.

“Kyaum!”

On top of that, its delicate lips were busily munching on some clovers. Renia, a transfer student from Australia, was completely smitten with the carbuncle.

“I always wanted... to raise a pet like this at least once... ugh, if only Gaon wasn’t a dorm school...”

As Renia began petting the carbuncle, it raised its fur and displayed strong signs of aggression.

“Kyauuum!”

“Ah~ sorry! I won’t touch you then, hehe! You’re mad, huh?”

Renia laughed awkwardly as if she found even those actions adorable. There was an issue regarding her and carbuncle’s little moment of happiness, however, and that was that Renia was taking a test at that point in time.

“Oh, right, the exam! But how am I supposed to hurt a cutie like this carbuncle...”

Right when Renia was thinking deeply about the situation she was in

Tap tap!

—Shin YuSung, who was using a technique called Physical Enhancement, appeared like a flash of light and flicked the carbuncle on its forehead with his fingers.

Flick!

“Kyaahk!”

The carbuncle fell down on its back with a terrifying cry. Renia was horrified.

“What?!”

As she stared at the scene with a surprised look, Shin YuSung gave her a quick glance, then took the jewel out of the carbuncle’s forehead.

He then brought the jewel near his wristband named [Pocket].

Swoop!

A light emitted from the wristband, and—as the light faded—the jewel disappeared along with it.

“So I’ve hunted down a rank 1 as well,” Shin YuSung muttered casually.

Tap tap!

Shin YuSung disappeared with the jewel without so much as a backward glance towards the carbuncle.

“As expected of the Demon of the Arena...” Renia quietly mumbled under her breath.

Shin YuSung wasn't going to go easy, even on something like the adorable carbuncle, in pursuit of his goal.

* * *

A luxurious cruise.

Kim EunAh was lying down on a sunbed as if she was on vacation. She was wearing a school uniform and had both sunglasses and a parasol—an odd combination. She was watching a monitor with interest.



“...It really is amazing.”

The upper-level classes could watch how the exam was progressing for

the others while waiting for their own to start. Even though K Channel had deployed a large number of drone cameras, Kim EunAh was only observing one person from the lower-level classes.

[Camera 1 – Shin YuSung]

The disciple of the Fist King, Shin YuSung.

Her interest had been initially piqued because of the pedigree behind his name, but that wasn't the case any longer.

‘...How is he using Physical Enhancement for such a long period of time?’

The thing Kim EunAh was most curious about regarding Shin YuSung's fighting was his Physical Enhancement. Physical Enhancement was not a technique a regular hunter considered part of their main repertoire. The reason for this was because of the large amounts of mana that had to be consumed while Physical Enhancement was temporarily boosting one's physical capabilities.

‘...But he's using his mana all willy-nilly?’

However, her assumption was nothing but her suspicion. The secret behind Shin YuSung's Physical Enhancement technique was in the core of the training method that the Fist King had perfected over several decades.

The principle was simple.

The Fist King had only taught Shin YuSung one phrase.

[Focus your mana on the part of your body you want to enhance, and only for an instant!]

It was easy enough to say but not simple at all. One needed a lot of concentration to enhance only one part of their body in the middle of a fight.

Ironically, Shin YuSung managed to do something most S-rank hunters

had failed because of his F-rank Trait.

F-rank Trait. [Heightened Focus].

[Heightened Focus], the Trait that Shin YuSung hadn't even learned the name of, had perfected the Fist King's teachings with just 12 years of training.

Kim EunAh could only chew on her thumbnail and come to the most obvious conclusion.

‘...Does he have a large pool of mana?’

Kim EunAh rested her chin on a pale hand and stared at the monitor as if trying to bore a hole in it. She evaluated every aspect of Shin YuSung.

‘Physical Enhancement is high S-rank. Mana pool is also S-rank. But his Trait is F-rank... how does a guy like this even exist?’

An opponent like this was a first for Kim EunAh. All of the battles that she had fought up to this point had been reliant on Traits. Due to that, she assumed that his strength had nothing to do with his own skill, but the effectiveness of his Trait.

‘...On top of that, I can't get a grip on what his effectiveness is. The reason I lost to Adela was because of how effective her Trait was against mine, after all.’

“This is fun, like I thought it would be,” Kim EunAh unconsciously said out loud.

Kim EunAh wanted to completely demolish Shin YuSung. Even though she had lost to Adela, who used ice, she felt that she had an advantage against someone like Shin YuSung, who used his body.

‘...He seems perfect for riling Adela up, too.’

With a playful laugh, Kim EunAh took out her phone. She opened an app that had been created at Gaon.

‘...He probably won’t come to the sparring arena if there’s no reward for him, right? He’ll have 100SP when he finishes this exam, so... ’

After thinking about it for a good while, Kim EunAh started to type something into the app.

[Spar Request: Shin YuSung]

[Terms: The loser must pay 150SP to the winner. If the loser does not have enough SP, the remaining balance will be deducted from the loser’s account and will be shown as a negative.]

“Fufu! He won’t be able to refuse this much!”

SP (School Points).

At Gaon Academy, SP was the same as money to the students; it had been integrated into many aspects of the academy—it could buy them privileges like outing passes and could even play a significant part in their exams.

Shin YuSung, who had enrolled in the academy late, did not have a single SP to his name.

“On the other hand, there isn’t much I can do if he gets scared and declines.”

Kim EunAh laughed in a confident manner and turned off the monitor.

* * *

At the swamp zone in the middle of Jewel Island.

Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun were fighting monsters back-to-back.

“Why are there so many baby salamanders in the swamp zone? This is totally different from what I learned at the Academy!”

Sung IkHyun was shouting his complaints. Hearing this, Jin MinAh

also started to complain loudly.

“Shit! Won’t you focus!? Do you want to get sent to the infirmary and get fixed up by the nanomachines again?”

“Why are you getting so angry! It isn’t humanly possible for us to defeat six of them—that’s too many!”

While the D Class students were arguing amongst themselves, the baby salamanders were slowly closing the gap between them.

“Kyaaaah!”

“Kyaoh!”

Sizzle!

One of the salamanders started spewing fire. Jin MinAh’s face became pale. She was a sword user, but her thigh had been hit by an attack and was currently bleeding. It was impossible for her to make the same nimble movements that she had made before.

“Aw man, what are we going to do?”

They had killed three out of the nine, but that was the limit for them.

“This is the end. When I open my eyes, I’ll be in one of the infirmary capsules, I guess,” Sung IkHyun mumbled in despair.

Right when the two students were being overcome with frustration.

Boom!

Shin YuSung appeared.

“So six of them have been left here.”

To Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun, six baby salamanders were a dangerous number of monsters, but to Shin YuSung, they were

nothing more than points to him. As if to prove it, he looked at the other two and casually asked,

“I can kill all of these, right?”

At Shin YuSung’s question, the two looked at each other then nodded at him with dumbfounded faces.

“Y-yeah! We’d be grateful!”

“Hunt as many as you want!”

Shin YuSung was a lifeline to Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun, who were on the verge of failing the exam.

“He must be strong if he destroyed Ju HaJin, right?” Jin MinAh whispered to Sung IkHyun with a happy expression.

“He’ll get tired after killing, like, three of them? And we can help him defeat the other three.”

“Oh~ and use that as a pretext to take some of the jewels?”

While Jin MinAh was in a good mood and snickering, Shin YuSung rapidly approached a baby salamander.

Tup.

While just inches away from the monster, he slowly stretched out his palm towards the baby salamander. Unlike its name, it was a 2-meter long lizard, befitting its status as a rank 2 monster.

But as Shin YuSung’s hand touched it, a large shockwave blew away the baby salamander’s body.

Battle God Style – Savage Dragon’s Boulder Crushing Palm

Kaboooooom!

The shockwave was much too strong for a rank 2 monster. The baby salamander turned into dust, leaving only the jewel embedded into its head behind.

“What the hell.”

“...That’s fucking nuts.”

The two couldn’t say anything as they watched Shin YuSung’s shocking display of his fighting style. They had never seen a student turn a rank 2 monster into dust with their bare fists before.

“Who the hell *are* you?!”

As Jin MinAh gathered her wits and managed to yell, the baby salamander next to her started to spew fire towards her.

But Shin YuSung would not allow an attack like that to happen. He moved in front of Kim MinAh and stretched out a mana-clad hand towards the flames. The fire was diverted away from Shin YuSung and spread out to either side of him.

“Is that his Trait? Maybe it’s telekinesis? But the rumors say that his Trait is definitely F-rank...”

Shin YuSung had not used telekinesis, unlike Sung IkHyun’s guess. He had simply expelled mana from his palm. Of course, one needed an incredible amount of concentration to expel enough mana in an instant to act as a shield, but it wasn’t a problem for Shin YuSung, who had the [Heightened Focus] Trait and twelve years of training in his belt.

On top of that, because he had the constitution of the nine blocked yin pathways and had been cultivating his mana, Shin YuSung was overflowing with mana.

This sort of illogical, idiotic form of combat was possible for Shin YuSung. No, it was only possible for Shin YuSung.

He was a monster that the Fist King had created.

Baaam!

With his final kick, the last of the monsters were turned into dust. Shin YuSung immediately left the area. Jin MinAh stared at his disappearing back for a long moment before belatedly opening her mouth.

“He took the jewels from the monsters we killed, too, didn’t he?”

Sung IkHyun double-checked the shallow swamp area with his hands, then shook his head.

“...All nine jewels are gone.”

“He sneakily took ours as well. What the hell. Is that supposed to be payment for our lives.”

Even as they had realized this, Shin YuSung was long gone.

Chapter 12

The waterfront between the cruise liner and Jewel Island.

Yu HanNah monitored Shin YuSung at the booth she had installed on the wharf.

“Ah, Student Shin YuSung is monopolizing the points by taking all of the monsters out!”

Yu HanNah was usually not all that high-strung when doing pre-recorded news, as opposed to live news. However, today, she was different.

“Hey, what was that skill just now? Is that a Trait that summons a shield?”

Until now, she had found star students of exceptional quality, but this was the first time that she had seen someone blazing a trail with his bare hands.

It was impossible to keep going on with the program because of Shin YuSung’s unique skill set. The headmaster, Jin ByungCheol, started butting in to explain.

“He is expelling mana from his palm. Of course, this isn’t the regular method of mana expelling that the students use! It’s a modified version that the Fist King cooked up. Huh huh!”

“So he created a shield just by expelling mana?” Yu HanNah asked, surprised.

Jin ByungCheol laughed loudly and nodded his head.

“Of course, it isn’t as easy as it sounds! You need to be at the height of concentration! To pump out mana at such a high pressure in the

middle of combat!”

“So you’re saying that student Shin YuSung did that?”

Yu HanNah’s eyes were twinkling with anticipation. Jin ByungCheol preened and started to boast for some reason.

“Well! Isn’t it obvious that’s the case, as he’s the disciple of the Fist King? You could say he’s worthy of being called a student of Gaon Academy! Hahaha!”

“Ohh! Makes sense!”

Jin ByungCheol had slipped into the booth and effortlessly become a guest host for the program.

“The question here is—can Shin YuSung become a Seven through this exam? That’s what we’re watching for. As the headmaster, I still think it’ll be difficult for him.”

“Well, why do you believe so when Shin YuSung is this strong?” Yu HanNah replied with a natural conversation starter.

Jin ByungCheol started to brag about Gaon Academy once more.

“Well, that’s because the skill level between the upper rank and lower rank classes is like night and day! Here’s a question—what era do we live in? That’s right, the era of teamwork! One’s ability to work in a team is just as important as their skill as an individual. If one wishes to become a Seven, there is little point in doing well on your lonesome in a 2-man exam!”

Even Yu HanNah was taken in by his eloquent words.

‘What kind of headmaster speaks this well... I heard he even goes on TV sometimes.’

She regained her composure and started to mutter again.

“...Then how low are the points of the student he was partnered with?”

When she asked this, Sumire’s score appeared on the monitor screen.

[Hanajima Sumire – 0 Points]

“Oh my god! Miss S-Sumire has zero points? What? Is this a bug? A calculation error?”

Shockingly, the total number of points Sumire had was 0. If the exam ended like this, it would be hard for Shin YuSung to become a Seven—no matter how high his own score was.

Like Jin ByungCheol had said, there was an incredible gap between the skill levels of the students in the upper and lower rank classes. Against monsters like Adela, one of the Sevens, one couldn’t be saddled with a 0-pointer like Sumire and earn the same number of points.

At this moment of desperation...

“Then we will check on her ourselves!”

Losing to her curiosity, Yu HanNah switched the monitor screen from showing Shin YuSung to Sumire.

* * *

Inside the peaceful forest of Jewel Island.

Sumire was muttering under her breath while tearfully staring at a carbuncle.

“W... waah... I’m an idiot... Even though Shin YuSung gave me his hair...”

What happened was simple. Sumire had taken out the tissue containing Shin YuSung’s hairs; she then dropped them on the ground

before she could take one out.

The carbuncle that was passing by at the time did not miss the opportunity.

“Kyarbunk!”

It had stolen the tissue by picking it up from the ground with its mouth.

“Ah!”

Sumire, whose face had gone pale, slowly approached the carbuncle while murmuring hesitantly:

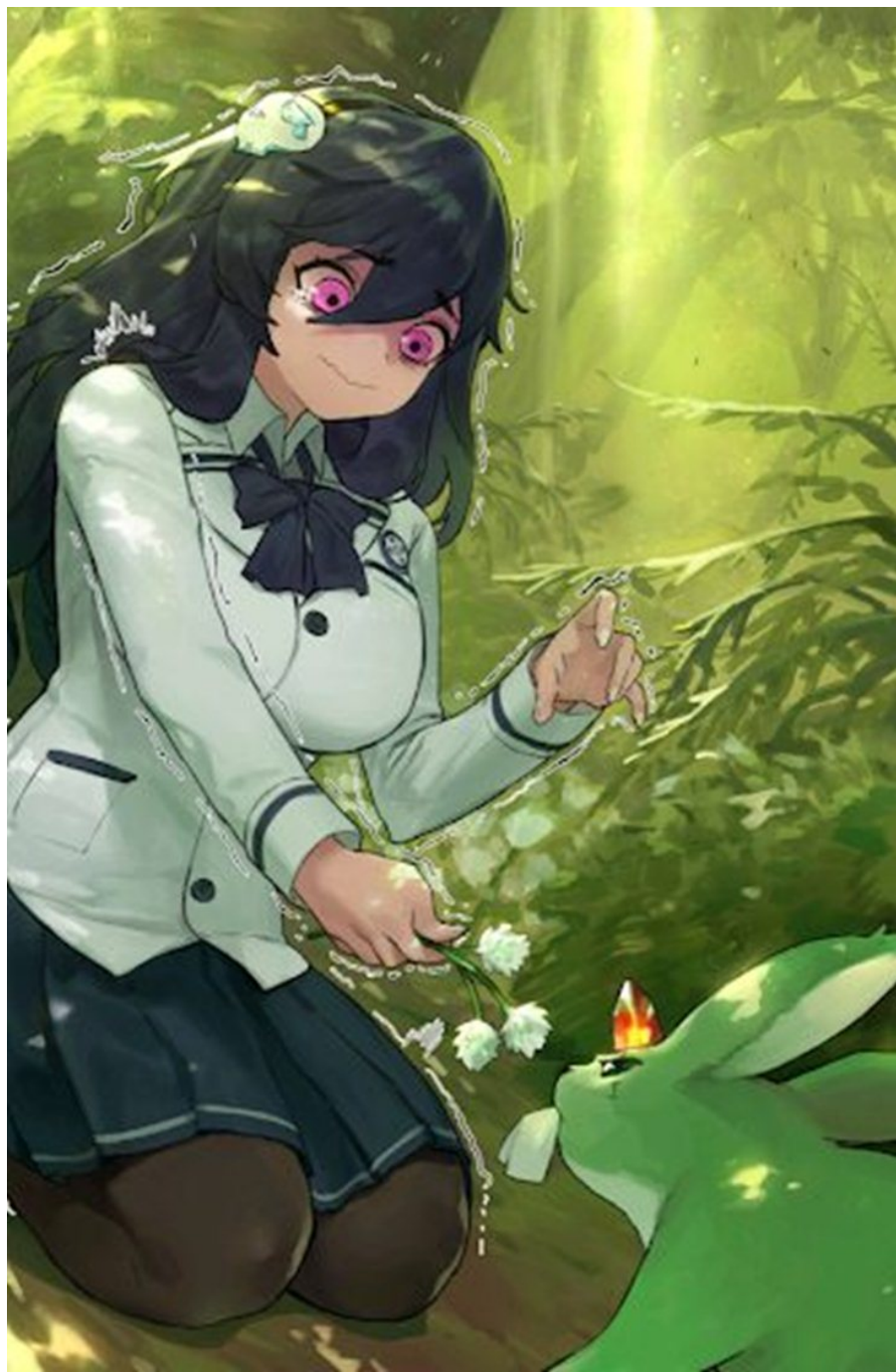
“A-ah! That’s mine... um, technically, it isn’t really mine, but...”

The funny thing was that the carbuncle didn’t make any move to run away, as if it knew that Sumire was weaker than it. Instead, the carbuncle was confidently staring her down in a menacing manner.

“Grrr...”

The carbuncle started to growl with the tissue in its mouth. Sumire flinched and moved a distance away, then pulled out some clover flowers and offered it to the monster.

“Don’t be like that... don’t you want these flowers instead of that tissue?”



* * *

Sumire was pleading to a carbuncle, the weakest monster on Jewel

Island, with a listless expression. The carbuncle flaunted its status as the victor by languidly munching on the clover flowers.

“G-good! Good boy! I’ll just... take the tissue, then?”

Sensing an opening, Sumire stretched her hand towards the tissue. The carbuncle, who had been munching on the flowers, raised all of the hairs on its body.

“Kyah! Kyarbun!”

“Kyahahak! I’m sorry! I won’t take it!”

Sumire eventually caved to the hard stance the carbuncle had taken and pulled back her hand. This was the first time in the history of Gaon Academy where a student wishing to become a hunter had lost to a carbuncle. Sumire had a baffling lack of ability that one could expect from the student with the lowest student ranking.

“So, it’s come down to this...”

Sumire sighed, then pulled out one of her own hairs. She dropped it on the ground.

Rrrrip!

At that moment, a grotesque skeleton crawled out of the dirt. However, the skeleton had the same passive posture as Sumire.

“S-skeleton! Steal the hairs from the carbuncle!”

As Sumire looked at the skeleton and gave it a command, it slowly approached the carbuncle, just like how Sumire had a moment ago.

It seemed like a summoned skeleton copied both the physical capabilities and the personality of the owner of its hair.

“...Clack? Clack?”

The skeleton stretched out a bony hand towards the carbuncle, just as Sumire had. The monster growled once more and raised its hairs.

“Kyaoh!”

Both the skeleton and Sumire were frightened by the monster.

“Clack clack!”

“H-Hiie!”

Sumire, who had been reduced to a blubbering mess, kept pushing the skeleton to do something.

“S-skeleton... you’re a summoned creature! Go and steal that tissue back!”

At that, the skeleton’s arm, bizarrely enough, snapped and fell.

Plop!

“Clack! Clack!?”

“Kar-karbunk!”

In the end, the carbuncle was surprised by the grotesque scene and ran away. No matter what method she had used, Sumire had eventually gotten Shin YuSung’s hairs back.

Sumire quickly ran towards the tissue and carefully picked them up. She checked that the hairs were still in there, then let out a sigh of relief.

“Uu, Shin YuSung-ssi’s hairs! HUUU, what a relief...”

She stared at the hairs as if they were a treasure.

“With these, even I can do it!”

Sumire grinned in a fragile manner, and as if handling something precious, she picked up one of the hairs from the tissue and dropped it on the ground.

Rip! Rrrip!

Just as before, a skeleton crawled out of the ground. But the atmosphere surrounding it and its posture were completely different.

Excited, Sumire looked at Shin YuSung's skeleton and, with great effort, shouted:

“Skeleton! Kill the monsters and collect the jewels!”

Sumire didn't realize right then.

To a skeleton who had the personality and physical capabilities of Shin YuSung, there was no such thing as moderation.

* * *

Snap!

Shin YuSung's skeleton ended the life of a gem snake slithering along the ground with one swipe of its foot.

“As expected of Shin YuSung-ssi's hair! Skeleton! You've grown really strong!”

Sumire started hopping around to express her sincere happiness, but this was only the beginning of its hunt.

Flick!

With one hit, the skeleton made a carbuncle it had found in the grass lose consciousness and ripped out the jewel in its head.

“Bwoooooo!”

Crash! Snap! Tear!

The skeleton even took down the pearl elephant that it had found while walking around in less than a minute. It then mercilessly snapped off the pearl tusks from the monster.

“U-um.....”

Even though it was a skeleton that Sumire had created herself, she was watching the unimaginable performance it was giving with a shocked expression.

“I, um, think that this is enough jewels for now...” she muttered.

But Shin YuSung’s skeleton didn’t know the meaning of satisfaction. It was like a demon that was summoned from hell to farm jewels.

Its greed knew no bounds, to the point where it did not hesitate in stealing the prey of D Class students.

“Clack clack, clack!”

The skeleton defeated two gem snakes and a baby salamander, then stole all of the jewels and ran away.

“What the hell, were Sumire’s skeletons always that strong?”

“That posture, it’s a bit like Shin YuSung’s?”

“Did the skeleton learn martial arts from Shin YuSung? In one day?”

A total of 4 people.

The two teams who had decided to cooperate and hunt the monsters together were whispering amongst each other in shock. Sumire saw the students and bowed to them multiple times.

“S-sorry! I’m sorry! That the skeleton took the jewels from the monster you guys were hunting and ran away...”

The student who responded to her apology was none other than the student from D Class who had been beaten to a pulp by Shin YuSung —Ju HaJin.

“Er, t-there’s no helping it if the skeleton took them... we should be living our lives while helping each other, right?”

His usual hot-blooded personality had disappeared, leaving a pacifistic one behind. It seemed like seeing Shin YuSung in the skeleton’s posture brought back his terror towards the boy that had been deeply carved into him.

Due to this, Sumire could leave without too much trouble.

“Ah, skeleton! Let me go with you!”

If there was something that was a shame in all of this, it was that Sumire was being dragged around by her own skeleton. Even so, the speed at which the skeleton was earning points was comparable to Shin YuSung’s.

This was when the last place began turning the tables.

Chapter 13

Yu HanNah hurriedly commentated on Sumire while watching her on the monitor in the broadcasting booth on the wharf.

“Due to the work of the skeleton that student Sumire had summoned, her team’s points ranking has been raised to the single digits!”

Yu HanNah slammed the table with her hands out of excitement and continued.

“It’s the birth-er, ahem! It’s the birth of a rookie contender!”

Yu HanNah had screamed loud enough that her voice had momentarily broken. Jin ByungCheol, who was next to her, had his mouth gaping open so wide that it looked like his jaw was unhinged.

“N-no way... but Sumire shouldn’t be that strong?”

The headmaster, Jin ByungCheol, had an idea about Sumire’s skillset; that was just how well she was known for being last place.

‘At best, her skeletons could run an errand... but this one is killing everything on the island!’

On top of that, the skeleton he had seen in the past at the sparring arena and the skeleton he was seeing right now were on completely different levels.

‘What’s going on? The skeleton that I was watching earlier was using the martial arts forms of the Fist King. Is this change in strength also due to Shin YuSung?’

While Jin ByungCheol was pondering this conundrum, Yu HanNah spoke up again with an impressed tone to her voice.

“Wow! So the students of Gaon Academy in even F Class are this strong? Student Shin YuSung, of course, but even student Sumire is displaying incredible skill!”

“Haha! O-of course!” Jin ByungCheol replied shakily.

Yu HanNah’s eyes shone from his response.

“If that’s the case, they’re just as— no, even more skilled than the Sevens from other academies!”

Because the main anchor of K Channel, Yu HanNah, had started gassing him up, the headmaster was preening.

“I already said that this is nothing for Gaon, didn’t I? Haha!”

Jin ByungCheol could feel thankfulness towards Shin YuSung welling up inside him, as promotion of the Academy was going swimmingly due to the boy.

‘I’ll have to do something for him after the exam ends... Yu WonHak, you’ve been a source of torment for me right up to your retirement! But you’ve finally given me a golden goose like this, huh?’

On the flip side, Yu HanNah gave a smirk while staring at Shin YuSung on the monitor screen.

“Fufu! An F-rank Trait? But with the skills to make someone with an S-rank Trait cry? And he has dazzlingly good looks? He’s a star to look out for!”

While she was thinking this, Shin YuSung was still being shown through the monitor to be fighting monsters and earning points.

He went fishing for ruby fish embedded with red jewels in the valley and he hunted jewel snakes in the forest. Currently, he was taking down moonstone bears along the mountain path.

It could be called nothing but a clean sweep.

Wherever Shin YuSung passed through, whole swaths of monsters were erased. He was even picking off the monsters that were in hiding as if he had an idea about all of their ecologies. Yu HanNah, who had been watching all of this, had gone past excitement and was currently dumbfounded.

‘Wait, how is this even possible? Is he a specially-trained hunter from a military unit?’

That wasn’t the end of the concerns regarding him. The students and academy staff, who had been watching the exam separately on the cruise liner, started to murmur amongst themselves:

“What the? Isn’t that the direction of Crystal Cave?”

“Is he actually going there on purpose?”

“Does the boss even net you any points?”

Currently, Shin YuSung’s location showed that he was going towards the prohibited area. A commotion began.

“Um, uhh... isn’t that the Crystal Cave on Jewel Island...?”

Yu HanNah, who had been watching, and Jin ByungCheol next to her were both shocked and making a huge fuss.

“W-why is! A student going there? D-don’t tell me! Instructor Lin Xiao! Did you not tell the students about the Crystal Cave?!”

At the headmaster’s shouting, Lin Xiao, who had been watching all of this from a distance, quickly ran towards him.

“N-no! The last instructor told me that they explained the Crystal Cave to the students...”

“Did! I! Not! Tell! You! That! Student Shin YuSung! Had only been enrolled! A few days ago?!”

Jin ByungCheol was shouting every word in staccato in an effort to keep a lid on his anger.

“I apologize! I must’ve forgotten to do it because it was only one student!”

Lin Xiao bowed his head, but Jin ByungCheol’s temper ran even stronger.

“Even so, there are things you shouldn’t forget!”

The reason why such a racket was being raised was because of the rank 4 boss slumbering in the Crystal Cave. Despite this, Yu HanNah was more encouraged by this situation than discouraged.

“That’s right! The ruler of Jewel Island lives in the Crystal Cave. There’s a reason~ that the area has been blocked off for the lower rank classes! Isn’t that so?”

Its identity was the crystal golem.

As the ruler of Jewel Island, it was a monster whose body was entirely composed of crystals. Its incredibly high defense coupled with its massive size meant that a run-of-the-mill student couldn’t even scratch it.

Lin Xiao waved his arms around as if trying to deny the reality before his eyes.

“C’mon, headmaster, would he really fight the golem? That monster won’t even wake up if he doesn’t enter the cave!”

“Ahem! It would be a relief if that was the case, but...”

Jin ByungCheol was giving a disapproving look at Lin Xiao. Right then, Yu HanNah glanced at the monitor, stood up again, and cried:

“Hey! He’s actually going inside?”

“What?!”

Jin ByungCheol forgot that this was a broadcast recording and shouted. Lin Xiao’s face grew pale.

“Is he... actually trying to hunt down the golem? Or does he not know that the golem is there?”

While he was muttering this, the headmaster scowled and yelled as if trying to devour the other man:

“What are you doing?! Just standing there and doing nothing! Go after him immediately!”

“I-I will!”

Lin Xiao started running towards the Crystal Cave, face stark white. If Shin YuSung got hurt from his mistake or had to quit the exam, Lin Xiao had to take responsibility for it—even if he didn’t have a way he could.

Yu HanNah, on the other hand, pursed her lips in excitement at the entertaining circumstances.

‘I can already see the ratings! And the money!’

She licked her lips and gave orders to the camera staff.

“Send a few more drone cameras to the cave. I, Yu HanNah, will promise you that you will be filming a legend.”

If Shin YuSung actually defeated the crystal golem, that would be the best situation for K Channel.

* * *

The entire cave was emitting a bright blue light; there were crystals of various colors that were hard to look away from. Shin YuSung followed a stream running through the cave to the center of it,

watching the water as if he was mesmerized.

“This place is...?”

The Crystal Cave of Jewel Island perfectly matched the conditions for a dungeon that his master had given him.

[YuSung-ah! Do you know what a really scary dungeon is like?]

10 years old.

As the still-young Shin YuSung shook his head, the Fist King Yu WonHak grinned, laughed in a way that sent shivers down one's spine, and continued.

[It's a place that suddenly becomes quiet! No matter how many beasts and monsters crawl around in a dungeon, it's dead quiet wherever the really strong guys live!]

Like his master had described, the Crystal Cave was silent and tranquil.

Plip. Plip.

It was so quiet that the sound of water droplets falling from the stalactites could be clearly heard by Shin YuSung.

He followed the stream and kept walking into the Crystal Cave.

‘We have enough points.’

Shin YuSung had an overwhelming amount of points. On top of that, if he combined it with the jewels Sumire had gotten, they were first place among the lower rank class students.

He was certain about this because he had checked his points before entering the Crystal Cave.

‘However...’

Exam scores were not what was important to Shin YuSung.

Vwoo—vwoo vwoo—

The drone camera had belatedly caught up to Shin YuSung, making loud noises along the way. Everything Shin YuSung was doing was slated to be broadcast by K Channel; this exam was a proper debut for him. If he couldn't captivate the audience right here and build his prominence, it would be impossible for him to participate in the International Competition.

‘...In that case, I can't be satisfied with just this.’

That was the kind of person Shin YuSung was.

Even when the Fist King had scared him by telling him that strong hunters existed all over the world, even when his entire body had been turned into a rag by a rank 2 monster—Shin YuSung's goal was always the same thing.

‘...The strongest hunter.’

Strong hunters were a dime a dozen all over the world, let alone Korea. Not everything the Fist King had said had been a lie.

If he wanted to prove himself and become the pinnacle of all of these hunters, he couldn't be satisfied at just this level.

He needed to leave a strong impression if he wanted to be completely acknowledged. Shin YuSung grinned as his thoughts reached this conclusion.

‘I understand now.’

Until just a moment ago, Shin YuSung was curious as to what feeling had led him to the cave. But now, he could clearly see what it was.

Shin YuSung wanted to fight stronger opponents and prove his worth; he was eager to reach a place higher than where he currently was.

‘I was looking for...’

An opponent who he could prove himself against.

Rrrumble!

As if responding to his emotions, the massive cave started to shake. There was something odd about the blue light emitting from the ceiling.

Shatter!

The vibrations caused large and small crystals to fall from the ceiling.

Boom! Bababam! Boom! Booom!

Smoke began to form and sway as the crystals fell and their innate mana sizzled away in the water... The crystals that had fallen everywhere started to create a shape, finding their place in the whole.

Shin YuSung’s eyes traced along the crystals that were forming a body.

Its height was at least a couple dozen meters.

The ruler of the cave spit out a mighty roar from the crack that served as its mouth.

“Gguuuuhhhhk!!”

The creature that had appeared in such a showy manner was the actual ruler of Jewel Island, the crystal golem.

‘Will my punch go through?’ Shin YuSung thought while looking up at the golem.

The crystal golem’s body was composed of crystals as hard as diamond.

Squeeze!

Shin YuSung clenched his fist. Even the disciple of the Fist King had never fought a rank 4 monster before.

Even so, Shin YuSung smiled in a relaxed manner. It was hilarious to imagine someone like him, aiming to become the strongest hunter, hesitating against an opponent like a golem.

[YuSung-ah, what you really have to be afraid of is not defeat!]

As the words of the Fist King he had suddenly remembered had said, there was not a single person out there who had succeeded in everything they had done. Humans grew stronger through their experiences of failure.

[What a hunter really has to be afraid of is giving up!]

Tup!

Shin YuSung kicked the ground and started a frontal assault. The crystal golem threw a gigantic punch at him.

Bam! Rumble! Rrrumble!

Its fist hit another fist, and a sudden competition of strength arose between the fighters. Shin YuSung twisted his body and deflected the golem's fist.

Boom!

At the same instant, crystal shards flew towards him from the ground. Shin YuSung used the golem's craggy arm as a ramp and ran towards its head at an incredible speed.

Tup! Tap tap tap!

“Kuguuuuhk!!”

With a heinous cry, the golem tried to match Shin YuSung's assault by moving its body.

However, it was too late.

Tup!

He had already leaped up to the golem's face.

'I'll smash it!'

As Shin YuSung tried to stabilize his stance, the crystals on the ground that were smashed into powder began soaring towards Shin YuSung's body.

They were flying through the air as fast as bullets.

'I can... '

Shin YuSung used his Trait to stretch his concentration to the utmost. As the mana flowed throughout his body, his senses became sharper through his focus. Shin YuSung mistakenly thought that the world had slowed down.

'See them.'

The shards that had been as fast as bullets were now flying too slow for Shin YuSung.

Woooooosh!

Shin YuSung tilted his head, and the sharp crystal shards flew past him by a hair's breadth. He had done this effortlessly while in midair.

Now, it was his turn to attack.

"Take..."

Shin YuSung pulled his right hand back. As there was nowhere for his

foot to brace against, it was harder to transfer power to his punch. However, that didn't matter.

He had thrown a countless number of punches after becoming the disciple of the Fist King. No matter what sort of disadvantageous situation he was in, Shin YuSung could not be stopped.

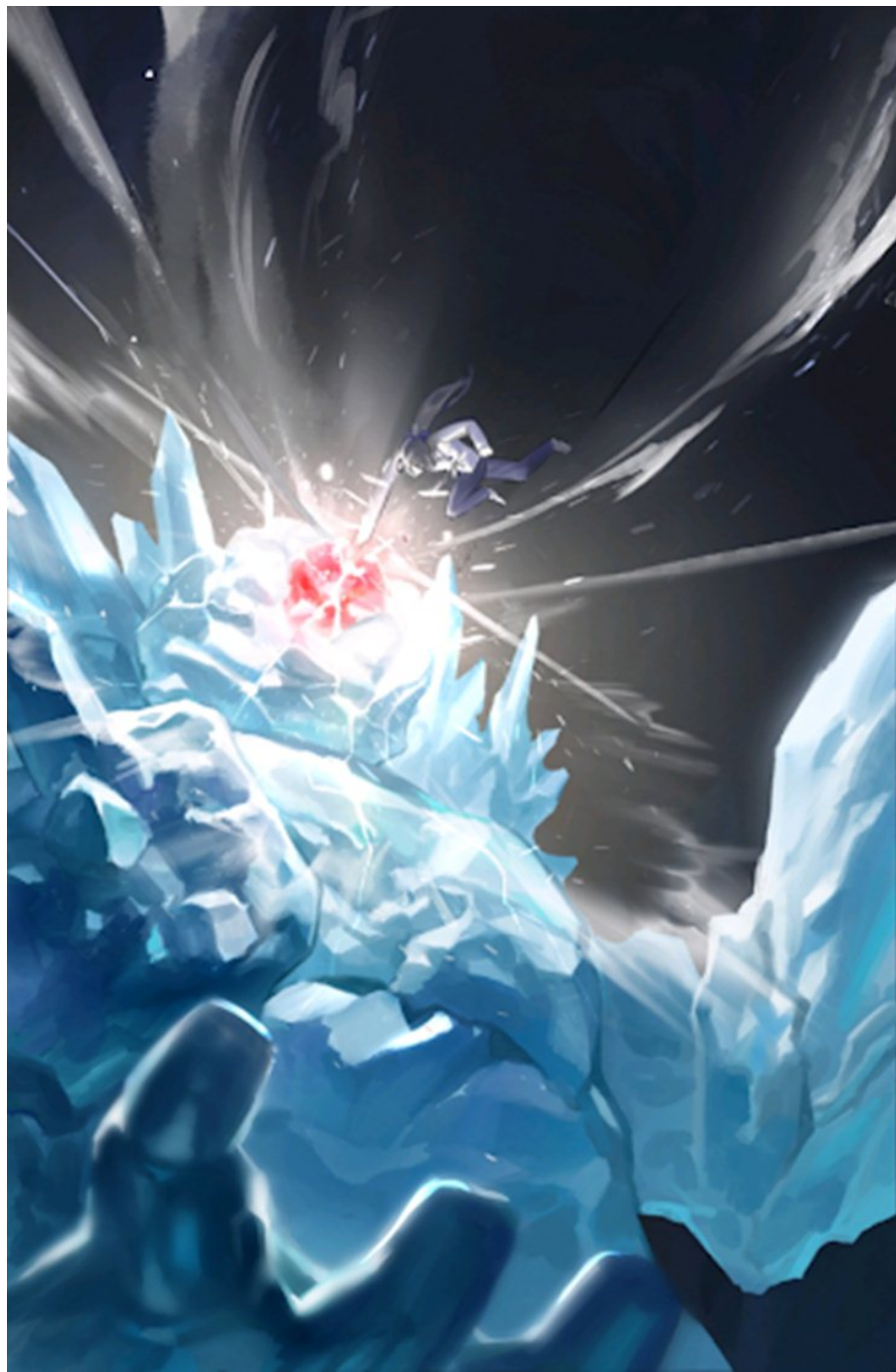
“This!”

As his concentration had been heightened, Shin YuSung could feel his fist cutting through the air's resistance. The mana that had been spread throughout his body brought out all of his skills to their limits.

Battle God Style Third Form – Heaven-Shattering Fist Strike

Crack!

Shin YuSung's punch hit the golem right on its head.



All he needed was one strike. Shin YuSung did not make any other attacks.

Astonishingly, despite being as hard as diamond, a crack had formed in the crystal. The core in its head had been split in half.

Craaaaack!

Eventually, the crystal golem lost the force that was driving it. Its crystals began to fall as if it were a crumbling sandcastle.

Bam! Bababam! Craaaaassh!

Shin YuSung took out the split core from amongst the pile of crystals.

Crumble!

As the core was removed, the crystals dissolved into mana and started to turn into smoke.

Fshh!

A complete victory against the ruler of Jewel Island, as well as a rank 4 boss monster. It was hard to believe that Shin YuSung, the owner of an F-rank Trait, had done this.

Vwoo vwoo

The drone hovered around him; its camera had recorded the entire fight.

Chapter 14

Yu HanNah screamed in excitement while watching the monitor.

“Student Shin YuSung has dodged all of the crystal shards! When they were flying as fast as bullets!”

The Shin YuSung on the screen was clenching his fist in midair. It was the moment where defeat or victory was on the line. In his fists was the principle the Fist King had taught him.

One hit, one kill.

The mana-boosted punch YuSung threw was so fast that it was hard for Yu HanNah’s eyes to follow it.

Boom!

An ear-splitting boom resounded as Shin YuSung’s fist smashed into the head of the crystal golem.

Cccrackk!

As its head and the core split in half, the golem lost its strength and fell.

Crashhh!

Yu HanNah and Jin ByungCheol held their breath as they saw the golem crumble into a heap of rubble. Even though the broadcast was still recording, the two couldn’t speak for a while. That was how shocking what Shin YuSung had done was.

Gulp.

Yu HanNah broke the long silence with a gulp.

“...Holy crap.” she said, with a wavering tone.

“Yu WonHak... so the disciple of a monster is a monster himself, as expected...”

Jin ByungCheol had also forgotten about the news broadcast and was mumbling the name of the Fist King. Shin YuSung had completely demolished the rank 4 boss monster, crystal golem.

He had split open in one strike crystal that was hard enough that a steel blade couldn't cut it. On top of that, it was news enough for a first-year from the Academy to be defeating a rank 4 boss, but Shin YuSung's Trait was F-rank—there had never been a precedent.

“...He really is incredible.”

Yu HanNah, who was mumbling this under her breath, started to quickly turn the gears in her head. If that footage got aired, it was certain that Shin YuSung's prominence would rise.

‘I can't let another news channel steal this kid. I have to make the first move and claim him.’

Finishing her calculations, Yu HanNah turned off her mic and grabbed Jin ByungCheol's hands.

“Mr. Headmaster?!”

“Whoa!”

Jin ByungCheol threw his head back in surprise. Yu HanNah inched closer to the man, eyes ablaze with passion.

“I'll give you a proposal! Gaon Academy should have exclusive broadcasting rights with K Channel.”

“Hm? What kind of... Suddenly throwing around ‘exclusive’ like that

is a bit...”

“At least for Shin YuSung!”

The headmaster started to think. K Channel was the kind of news station that waved its net worth in people’s faces, and even towards Gaon Academy, like a weapon.

‘...Did this woman eat something weird? Well, in any case, having K Channel as a partner isn’t bad at all.’

Until then, Gaon had been getting a lot of financial Support from K Channel in exchange for allowing them to film its students.

They were also huge sponsors for many guilds and corporations that were recruiting outstanding students.

‘But that’s all talk that was going on before Shin YuSung existed... ’

Finishing his calculations, Jin ByungCheol squinted his eyes. The reason that Yu HanNah was making this appeal was because of Shin YuSung. The boy, who could still boast an undefeated record, had the worth of a winning lottery ticket waiting to be scratched.

‘There’s no need for me to make a contract just yet when he hasn’t even shown us the full extent of his power.’

Skyscraper Academy’s Liú Jùn in China.

Clocktower Academy’s Lorelei in Britain.

There were students with an incredible amount of prominence, even at the academy level, in other countries as well—such as the United States and Japan; those students had gone on to become the stars and the faces of their respective academies, bringing their image up along with them.

‘Adela was the star of our academy... ’

But Adela was a transfer student who had come from Italy. It was a stretch to use her as the face of Gaon Academy.

But Shin YuSung fulfilled all of the requirements that Jin ByungCheol had for a representative student of the Academy.

‘He’s Korean, first of all. His title as the Fist King’s disciple is valuable. On top of that, he has incredible skill unbefitting of his F-rank Trait!’

Jin ByungCheol smirked.

‘Even to K Channel, it’s a waste to give them exclusive rights to Shin YuSung!’

At odds with his devious thoughts, Jin ByungCheol refused the offer with a pleasant laugh.

“Huh huh, as the headmaster, I’d like to ask for the opinion of student Shin YuSung when the exam ends. Of course, I believe talk about the contract will go over well.”

“Well, we’ll be waiting for your response then. Please contact us at any time.”

Yu HanNah looked disappointed, but there was nothing she could do. As a pro, she knew this was the time to take a step back. Of course, that didn’t mean that she was willing to let another news station steal Shin YuSung away.

‘...Hm. I’ll have to meet him later and try to appeal to him separately. Money should sway him, right?’

Yu HanNah grinned and started to quicken her steps. Her tall high heels clacked loudly on the wharf, and the sound rang throughout the area.

* * *

“What the helllllll!!”

Kim EunAh's cry stood out even amongst the hubbub on the cruise liner.

"What just happened?! How can he defeat a rank 4 monster with one strike..."

Kim EunAh was mumbling this with a bewildered expression on her face, her sunglasses dropped onto the ground in her shock. The only reason that she had invited Shin YuSung to a spar was because she was bored.

But what was happening before her eyes was worrying.

'O-of course, to a genius like me, a golem is nothing... but shouldn't I at least get a better grasp of his skills beforehand?'

Gulp.

Kim EunAh swallowed dryly and took out her cellphone with a nervous expression.

'...Should I cancel it?'

But, against her wishes, a message had appeared on the screen.

[Spar Registered]

"Aw shit! It already got registered?! Why does it process stuff like this so fast only when you don't want it to?"

Kim EunAh unconsciously began chewing on her thumbnail. She opened her mouth and started muttering rapid-fire under her breath.

"Tch... If I cancel it now, he'll think that I chickened out, right?"

She muttered like this for a while until eventually pulling at her hair with a yell.

"Argh, should I just...! Fight him?!"

The students around her were loudly chattering with each other, oblivious to Kim EunAh's circumstances.

"At this rate, isn't Shin YuSung going to become a Seven by the end of this exam?"

"It might really be possible if he combines his score with Sumire's."

"I can't believe they're from the lower rank classes..."

Like a spark was lit, the students started to show their appreciation of Shin YuSung's capabilities. Rather unfairly, Kim EunAh aimed her wrath at them.

"Hey! Shut up! Why are you guys blabbering so loud next to *me*, anyways?"

Everyone turned their gazes towards her at the sound of her deafening shout. Kim EunAh glared back at the students with a pissed-off expression on her face.

"...What, something to see here?"

Zzt! Zzt!

A large amount of electricity began to surround her as it reacted to her temper.

"N-nope!"

"Sorry! We'll go and talk somewhere else!"

Kim EunAh managed to chase most of the students away, as she was a source of terror. One of the male students from the same A Class smiled in a friendly manner and approached her.

"So you were here, huh?"

7th in student rankings, Park SuHyun. He was a genius that had risen

to the spot of one of the Sevens with his real-life combat experience and his Trait that controlled water. But Park SuHyun was much more interested in something other than his grades.

‘...I can use Kim EunAh in a lot of different ways if I become friendly with her.’

As part of a Chaebol family, Park SuHyun’s interests were always grounded in inheriting his family’s corporation.

That was why Park SuHyun had constantly tried to become Kim EunAhs’s friend after enrolling into the Academy—She had the worth of being the pampered granddaughter of the Shinsung group’s chairman.

“Why are you so worked up today?”

Despite Park SuHyun’s considerate tone, Kim EunAh’s answer was cold.

“None of your business.”

Kim EunAh scrunched up her face into an annoyed expression. Park SuHyun had a kind smile plastered on his face, but his eye was twitching.

‘This rude little... ’

He endured Kim EunAh’s attitude while throwing curses at her from inside his head. She was always incredibly haughty, but Park SuHyun couldn’t do anything else but endure it.

‘...Even our corporation is nothing but a small business compared to the Shinsung group.’

He kept trying to talk to her in an effort to get closer.

“You’re watching the lower rank classes? C’mon, elites like you and me don’t need to give a crap about trash like that.”

Park SuHyun tried to flatter Kim EuhAh by putting down the lower rank classes and Shin YuSung, and forced a sense of camaraderie by purposefully saying “you and me”.

But her reaction was unexpected.

She cocked one eyebrow as if displeased

“Trash?” she said.

Kim EunAh immediately thought of Shin YuSung destroying the crystal golem with one strike. She squinted her eyes and laughed, as if mocking SuHyun.

“Is that so? I think you’d lose against him. You haven’t forgotten that he’s the disciple of the Fist King, right?”



“Haha, of course not. But even if he’s the disciple of the Fist King, he has an F-rank Trait—”

While saying this, Park SuHyun adjusted his glasses with his middle finger. Kim EunAh cut him off, however.

“You wanna fight with him, then?”

Her sudden proposal.

As Park SuHyun gave her a bemused look, Kim EunAh marched up to him and showed her phone screen to him.

[Spar Registered]

[Challenger: First grade A Class Kim EunAh]

[Challenged: First grade F Class Shin YuSung]

[Terms: The loser must pay 150SP to the winner. If the loser does not have enough SP, the remaining balance will be deducted from the loser’s account and will be shown as a negative.]

“I initially registered a spar with him. But if he loses to someone like you, I won’t need to fight him, right?”

Park SuHyun’s brows twitched as he saw through her ploy.

“So you’re treating me as a lab rat?”

With an awkward laugh, he tried to get out of the fight that Kim EunAh was foisting off on him.

“Haha, I mean, I have my own reputation to keep. How can a Seven like me fight an F Class student like...”

“Is that so? Well, nothing can be done about it then. I guess the student with the second-highest rank~ has to spar with him out of the generosity of her own heart! Ah~ what a pain!” she said, putting an emphasis on her words and glancing towards Park SuHyun. She waved him away as if he were a bug.

“What are you doing? Go on, shoo.”

He had definitely lost points with Kim EunAh. Park SuHyun let out a sigh and decided to go back on his word.

“U-um, actually. Now that I’ve thought about it, I’ll fight him.”

“Pfft, so suddenly?” Kim EunAh asked in a sarcastic manner.

Park SuHyun laughed.

“Haha. It’s a little overboard for the second-strongest student to fight F-rank trash like him.”

There was a gap between Kim EunAh and Park SuHyun that had existed between the two since they were born. Something like pride wasn’t important if he could close that distance between them.

As a matter of fact...

“Is that so? Good~ good~ If you’re going to fight him, go and win it, will you?” Kim EunAh responded nonchalantly as if she was used to this happening.

* * *

Crystal Cave was awash in translucent, blue light. Instructor Lin Xiao pointed at the pile of rubble that used to be the golem.

“D-did you do that? A rank 4 boss monster?” he said in a shaky voice.

A boss monster.

As the ruler of a dungeon, they had [Traits], unlike regular monsters. To your average first year, even non-boss rank 4 monsters were incredibly powerful beings.

But Shin YuSung had demolished a rank 4 boss monster on his own.

Even more surprisingly, his Trait was F-rank.

But Shin YuSung fixed his hair in a relaxed manner and nodded.

“Yes.”

From his wristband-shaped storage, he took out the golem’s core and showed it to Lin Xiao.

“This is the core of the crystal golem. This applies to my total score, right?”

While this was the first time that a first-year had ever killed a rank 4 monster on Jewel Island, there was, of course, a standard that was used to hand out points.

A trophy from a rank 1 monster was worth 1 point.

A trophy from a rank 2 monster was worth 3 points.

A trophy from a rank 3 monster was worth 10 points.

And a trophy from a rank 4 monster was worth 30 points.

But the monster Shin YuSung had defeated was no ordinary rank 4 monster.

‘...To think that an F Class student defeated a rank 4 boss!’

Lin Xiao’s lips were dry.

The opponent was a boss monster.

The points allocated to a boss monster were, in consideration of the heightened difficulty in defeating one, three times the point value of a regular monster of the same rank. That meant that the golem core that Shin YuSung held in his hand was worth 90 points.

“Y-yes... of course it counts towards your total.”

That wasn't the end of it.

Because there no longer existed a rank 4 boss monster on Jewel Island, it was impossible for either the lower-rank class students or the upper-rank class students who were next in line to take the exam to get a higher score than Shin YuSung.

Lin Xiao looked at the boy with a serious expression and fell into thought.

‘So an F Class student... is going to dominate this exam.’

Because of his F-rank Trait, Shin YuSung was the subject of many ‘firsts’. Even to Lin Xiao, who had watched over many geniuses at Skyscraper Academy, Shin YuSung was special—he wasn’t simply strong, he was a breath of fresh air to hunters who believed that Traits were everything.

‘He really is the Fist King’s disciple..... ’

While he was looking at Shin YuSung’s back with the same serious expression. The cellphone in his pocket began to vibrate.

Vmmm!

[Instructor Lin Xiao, please come back here. We need to have a talk. –Jin ByungCheol–]

What greeted him was a message from Jin ByungCheol. Lin Xiao felt a chill down his back.

Chapter 15

Trot trot.

As Shin YuSung stepped out of the cave, the warm afternoon sun's rays made the golem core twinkle in the light. At the same moment, the golem's mana, which had been stuck on Shin YuSung, blew away in the wind.

A tranquil forest was spread out before his eyes.

The sound of a loud siren broke the silence, however, ringing over the entirety of Jewel Island.

Wee-oow!

The siren sound, after catching the attention of the people on the island, turned into the voice of a female teacher and started to give instructions to the students.

[Today's first Jewel Scramble on Jewel Island has concluded. To all students who participated in this exam, please gather around in front of the cruise ship.]

Lin Xiao belatedly exited the cavern as Shin YuSung tried to make his way towards the cruise liner. The older man gently placed a hand on Shin YuSung's shoulder before talking to him in a friendly manner.

"YuSung-ah! A-are you hurt anywhere? This Lin Xiao will gladly help you if you are!"

He was fretting over Shin YuSung with an apologetic expression on his face as if trying to make up for the mistake he made in not letting Shin YuSung know about the cave.

"I'm fine. I wasn't hurt anywhere."

“Ha, haha! R-right? As expected of the Fist King’s disciple... no! I’ll have to say ‘as expected of YuSung-ah’ from now on!”

Lin Xiao laughed boisterously as if trying to prove it. On the inside, however, he was sweating. It was an expected reaction since his job as an instructor would have been in danger if Shin YuSung had gotten hurt by the golem.

Seeing Lin Xiao let out a sigh of relief, Shin YuSung gave him a calm reply.

“Instructor, you’re looking a little nervous. You’re breathing incredibly fast as well.”

“Hm? Me? I was just worried that one of my students was hurt... it must have gotten to me, hahaha!”

“Thank you for your concern. It wasn’t a very strong opponent, though.”

Lin Xiao couldn’t help but feel an inexplicable discomfort as Shin YuSung gave him a mysterious smile and passed him by.

* * *

Jewel Island. In front of the cruise liner.

The lower-rank students were all gathered on the shore to hear what score they got on their exam. The beautiful, blue sea was spread out before their eyes, and the cool breeze was reminiscent of a vacation spot, but the students had very clearly nervous expressions on all of their faces.

“These really are unusual results.” The female professor who taught Dungeon Studies commented and pushed her glasses up her face.

Slip.

Sumire was mumbling with a nervous expression while clutching tightly onto Shin YuSung’s uniform.

“...I-I should be fine this time. I got Shin YuSung’s hair... and the skeleton was really strong, too. Even though I, *sniff*... lost sight of the skeleton...”

It seemed to be that Sumire was clutching onto Shin YuSung’s clothes in a subconscious manner. Her hand was shaking so violently—as if an earthquake was happening in the area—that one of the buttons from Shin YuSung’s shirt managed to fall off.

Plink.

‘...At this rate, my clothes are going to start ripping.’

Eventually, he took Sumire’s hands off of his uniform.

“You’ll be fine. You did your best, after all,” he said.

“R-really? But still...”

As Sumire was about to say something else pessimistic, the large monitor that had been placed on the wharf displayed the students’ scores.

[1st Place–Shin YuSung (F Class)]

[2nd Place–Sumire (F Class)]

[3rd Place–.....]

Shin YuSung, who had placed first, already had a good idea of the results because he had been counting his points. But Sumire was looking for her name starting from the very bottom.

120th place. 68th place. 13th place. No matter how far up she went on the rankings, she couldn’t see her name. Sumire started making odd exclamations.

“Ah, ah? Ah!”

Her wandering gaze eventually reached the top, at second place. It was an unimaginable, shocking result.

“...Ahh? Ahaha!?”

Sumire was so happy that she had grabbed Shin YuSung’s hand with her own without a thought and was hopping in place.

“Second place! I’m second! Shin YuSung-ssi!”



As Shin YuSung gave her an awkward smile, Sumire finally checked her hands and, blushing, mumbled:

“Um, o-of course! This wasn’t due to my skill! But entirely because of Shin YuSung-ssi’s hairs...”

While a flustered Sumire was fumbling her words, Lee SiWoo had found his own at some point in time. He leaned his head towards Shin YuSung and began to speak.

“YuSung-ah! You got first place! You really are amazing!”

But, smiling with an awkward expression, Shin YuSung didn’t reply back. Contrary to the stories that the Fist King had hammered into him during his training, it was much too easy for Shin YuSung to get first place in the Academy exam.

The gap was so large among the lower-rank classes that, exempting his partner, Sumire, the point difference between Shin YuSung and the students in 3rd place was so large that it was hard to compare the two.

‘...I was so worried, though.’

Now that the exam had ended, the difficulty level of it was low enough that Shin YuSung considered it trivial.

‘...Compared to the training I did with Master, it’s way too easy.’

Shin YuSung had reached the highest degree of skill, irrespective of his Trait, due to the limit-breaking training that he had received.

If one wanted to compare themselves to Shin YuSung, they had to at least have the same amount of skill as a Seven.

‘The hunters that Master mentioned must be the students who are a part of the Sevens, right?’

When the Fist King had taught Shin YuSung, he had always made him fight opponents of a higher level than him. Because of that, Shin YuSung had unknowingly started to crave a fight with a strong opponent.

‘I want to fight one as soon as possible.’

* * *

Lee SiWoo approached Shin YuSung—who was lost in thought—with cat-like strides, then latched onto him in a friendly manner.

“YuSung-ah~ looks like you’re deep in thought! Are you possibly enjoying the taste of victory?”

Even though Lee SiWoo had just come back from taking his test, his chatterbox personality was ever-present. He kept talking without showing any indication of being tired.

“Hm, come to think of it... With your grades, being a Seven is pretty much assured. That’s gotta leave some sort of impression on you!”

“U-um...”

Sumire, who had lost her chance to talk, stood slightly away from Shin YuSung and carefully stretched out her hand.

“Umm, h-here? Shin YuSung-ssi?”

He looked at Sumire’s wriggling fingers, which were showing her embarrassment.

“What’s this?” he asked with a puzzled look on his face.

“Oh! These are the leftover hairs from Shin YuSung-ssi! Since the exam is over, I thought I should return them to you...”

Sumire offered the napkin containing the hairs to Shin YuSung. With a bemused expression, Shin YuSung grabbed the napkin and shook out the hairs.

“Oh, that... just throw it away.”

Sumire began to scream in surprise, eyes wide open, as the strands of

hairs fell onto the ground.

“U-uwaaa! Nooo! Throwing away something so precious!”

She crouched down and started pawing at the ground in search of the hairs, eventually finding them. With both hands, she held the hairs as if they were cherished objects. She looked up at Shin Yusung.

“Then, can I, um... take these hairs for myself?” she asked.

Lee SiWoo, who didn’t know the context of Sumire’s actions, shivered at the sight.

“Ugh...”

On the flip side, Shin YuSung, who had gotten used to this behavior, merely nodded with a defeated look on his face.

“Um, sure...”

In this manner, the first exam that Shin YuSung had taken at Gaon Academy had ended in success.

* * *

The day when the new student rankings were being announced.

Park SuHyun had to force his way through the throng of noisy students to check the notice board.

[9th Park SuHyun (Class A)]

“W-what?”

Park SuHyun didn’t care all that much about his grades, but being a Seven was very important to him

“I’m ninth?”

His grades were in seventh place just one exam ago, meaning that he was a Seven. But now, he had been pushed down to ninth place, far below the Sevens. Park SuHyun scanned the notice board with a puzzled expression.

‘Who on earth... ’

[1st Adela (S Class)]

[2nd Kim EunAh (A Class)]

Perhaps because of their previous scores, the powerful Adela and Kim EunAh had maintained their first and second places in the rankings. But the problem was with the rankings below them.

[3rd Shin YuSung (F Class)]

[...]

[6th Sumire (F Class)]

Shin YuSung and Sumire, mere F Class students, had become Sevens.

“How did F Class students...?!”

On top of that, Park SuHyun recognized the name written next to third place from somewhere.

‘...Shin YuSung?’

He had forgotten about the existence of F Class Shin YuSung after the exam; he had thought that he would be in for some light exercise on the day of the spar.

‘But that F Class is a Seven?’

Moreover, YuSung was in third place—much higher up than his own ninth placement. Kim EunAh’s voice suddenly began replaying next to Park SuHyun’s ear.

[Is that so? I think you'd lose against him.]

Her words were neither a lie nor a taunt. If Shin YuSung's skills were high enough to be placed as a Seven, Park SuHyun had to consider the possibility that he could be defeated in this fight.

‘Shit... if I lose a fight against an F-rank Trait... ’

To someone like Park SuHyun, who took great stock in his own prestige, there was nothing more terrifying to him than losing to someone inferior. While he was biting his lip and fighting a headache at the thought, he heard Lee SiWoo's cheeky voice saying something next to him.

“Wow! You really are a Seven! On top of that, you're third place! But that guy, Park SuHyun, is only ninth place. Why did he challenge you to a match?”

Lee SiWoo's ranking was incomparably lower than Park SuHyun's, but he was putting the other boy down by bringing up Shin YuSung.

‘That little... ’

Unable to endure it any longer, Park SuHyun approached Shin YuSung and Lee SiWoo.

“Were you looking for me? What did you say?” he said.

At Park SuHyun's furious face, Lee SiWoo started to sweat then ran away.

“Sorry!”

Park SuHyun glared at the fleeing Lee SiWoo for some time but then redirected his gaze towards Shin YuSung and started to size him up.

Seeing the missing button that Sumire had torn off of his shirt, he clicked his tongue and adjusted his glasses.

“So the appearance of the Fist King’s disciple is rather shabby, it seems.”

Shin YuSung respected the Fist King, Yu WonHak, more than anyone else. His face froze as Park SuHyun brought up his master’s name in such a manner.

But the angry Park SuHyun did not stop his jeering.

“Furthermore, you’ve become one of the Sevens despite being an F Class student. Ha! Did the Fist King pull some strings?”

“You should watch what you’re saying.”

Park SuHyun felt a shiver down his spine at Shin YuSung’s frigid voice as it rang out around them.

‘Why is this guy’s presence... ’

Shocked by Shin YuSung’s demeanor, Park SuHyun took a subconscious step back. Shin YuSung looked down at the other boy with a cold glare.

Just as their clash of wills was about to spiral out of control, Kim EunAh, who happened to be passing by at the time, got in between the two.

“Hey, is there any reason you guys are trying to glare each other to death in the middle of the hallway? You guys are going to spar later on~ just decide it there!”

With a smirk in her tone, Kim EunAh chastised the two. With no other option available, Park SuHyun left the area.

“Fair enough. I look forward to the match.”

Shin YuSung did not respond to Park SuHyun’s words. The reason that he had accepted the match in the first place was for the SP and a chance to fight against someone from the upper-rank classes, but that was no longer important to him.

Chapter 16

[The Sevens]

A title of honor given to the top 7 students with the highest grades, but the title was especially more meaningful in Gaon Academy.

This was because Korea was the top hunter nation in the world, and Gaon was called the finest academy in Korea.

“So, it should be a given for elites like the Sevens to have all of these benefits!”

Headmaster Jin ByungCheol was explaining the privileges that the Sevens had access to with a boastful laugh.

Because of the unbelievable exploits that Shin YuSung had done, Jin ByungCheol was overflowing with goodwill and approval for the boy. What he was most thankful of regarding Shin YuSung were his [broadcasting rights].

‘Just how many news channels visited us today... ’

After the Jewel Island exam was broadcast, Shin Yusung immediately fell under the spotlight with his high level of skill unbefitting of his F-rank Trait and his attention-grabbing looks from the nine blocked yin pathways.

[Fist King’s disciple! Achieved third place!]

[Shin YuSung! Destruction of the Crystal Golem!]

[The unusual exploits of someone with an F-rank Trait!]

Various headlines dominated the search engine—because of that, news broadcasting stations visited Gaon Academy to meet with the

headmaster in an effort to monopolize Shin YuSung.

“If you have anything you’re curious about, or have any complaints, go ahead and tell me all of them!”

Due to the boy, Jin ByungCheol had the position of power for the first time in a long while. Because of that, he was trying to make Shin YuSung as comfortable as he could with a pleasant smile on his face.

“Thank you very much.”

As Shin YuSung replied with an innocent smile on his face, Jin ByungCheol grinned and handed him a piece of paper.

“Huh huh! It’s a bit too early to thank me. Go ahead and read this first!”

Shin YuSung had no idea why the headmaster was treating him so well, but it was clear to him from Jin ByungCheol’s attitude that the man was favoring him.

Crinkle.

Shin YuSung lifted the paper that the headmaster had given him.

[1. Maintenance fees provided]

[2. Sevens-exclusive dorms]

[3. Permission to leave during weekdays (extracurricular activities)]

[4. Permission to freely attend classes]

[5. Portal use fees provided]

[6. Personal VIP Card for Academy City]

[...]

The benefits granted to the Sevens were plainly written on the piece of paper. First of all, under the pretext of maintenance fees, the Sevens received money rivaling a salaryman's pay once a month from the government. The seven dorm rooms for the Sevens boasted the latest facilities that were second to none, even compared to hotels.

On top of that, they were allowed to leave the academy for extracurricular activities and had the choice to attend only the classes that they wanted to go to. The benefits of being a Seven also included receiving a VIP card that would let them use various facilities of Academy City for free—there was no end to them.

This staggering amount of support was possible for South Korea, one of the top hunter countries in the world.

‘...This is incredible.’

Shin YuSung read the paper, genuinely impressed. Jin ByungCheol gave a proud smile and laughed.

“It doesn’t look like it, but I did put a lot of thought into some of these provisions. Huh huh!”

Jin ByungCheol tried to gauge Shin YuSung’s reactions.

“And, since you’re a Seven now, how about participating in extracurricular activities? It’ll be a good experience for you,” he added carefully.

Extracurricular activities.

While there were a lot of places that were looking for hunters in society, the number of them on active duty were too few. Because of this, corporations substituted them with skilled students to perform jobs.

Of course, the students who completed the missions received money and SP and the school received fame and contracting fees. Extracurricular activities, therefore, were not much different from the jobs that hunters took.

“If there is a request, I am always open to take it.”

Thankfully, Shin YuSung had a good idea of what the extracurriculars entailed, due to Lee SiWoo explaining them beforehand.

“Haha! There’s never a shortage of requests! However, the extracurricular activity this time is of a somewhat large scale. Of course, the rewards are large, as well!”

Jin ByungCheol smirked and took out a registration form as if he had been expecting this.

[Request: Academy Dungeon Raid Competition]

[Organizer: Kang YuChan]

[Reward: Artifact]

At the familiar name, Shin YuSung, who had been reading the registration form, lifted his head and looked at Jin ByungCheol. Kang YuChan was a name that the Fist King had repeated to him until his ears had fallen off.

“...So this person really is him?”

“Huh huh, yes! It’s a name any hunter should know!”

The president of the South Korean Hunter Association. Kang YuChan.

He was a legendary hunter who had raised Korea to the status of the greatest hunter nation alongside the Fist King, Yu WonHak.

But the competition being hosted was an event that was personally being supervised by the association president. With a serious expression, Jin ByungCheol stared at the boy.

“Only two students from the Academy can participate in this competition! I want you and Adela to go together!”

As a matter of fact, Jin ByungCheol wanted Shin YuSung, a current hot topic, to go to the competition more than Kim EunAh, who was second in the student rankings.

On top of that, the reward was an artifact called a hunter's treasure. For Shin YuSung, who wanted to become the Korean representative of the International Competition by raising his prominence, there was no better opportunity than this.

"Sounds good. I will participate."

Jin ByungCheol laughed boisterously again at the boy's enthusiastic reply.

"Huh huh huh! Good, good! There's still plenty of time left until the day of the competition, so make sure to properly prepare yourself!"

Jin ByungCheol maintained his friendliness towards Shin YuSung until the end. He poured affection towards the student who could vouch for his own strength.

'I'll have to tell Yu WonHak that YuSung is going to participate in the event. He'll put in a good word for the boy since he has connections to the Association, right?'

Through the headmaster's excessive care, Shin YuSung was enjoying the man's preferential treatment.

* * *

A weekend. Shin YuSung rubbed his eyes as he woke up on top of a fluffy bed.

'...I really am not used to the feel of this mattress.'

Before he had started attending the academy, Shin YuSung's bed was the natural environment of the Martial Spirits' Mountain itself.

His master, the Fist King, had made seven-year-old Shin YuSung take short naps in the middle of the night on treetops in an effort to raise

awareness of his surroundings. He had also taught the boy how to light a fire inside a cave, as well as survival techniques.

Shin YuSung had washed himself with freezing river water even in the bone-chilling cold of winter. But now it was different.

Pshhh!

The water from the showerhead was pleasantly hot, and the bathroom was awash in the scent of bath products.

‘So this is the dorm of a Sevens student... ’

After finishing his shower, Shin YuSung dried his long hair with a white towel and walked towards the dorm’s refrigerator.

[Please choose your desired item.]

It was a special fridge with a screen on it.

As if he had gotten used to how the dorms worked in just a day, Shin YuSung easily completed his order.

[Order complete!]

[Dairy Product: Banana-flavored milk*]

Vmm!

At the same time, the sound of a machine starting up began emitting from inside the fridge.

Click.

After it had finished, Shin YuSung opened the door. In the previously empty interior was a carton of banana-flavored milk.

Shin YuSung stabbed the straw in the top and started to ponder while sipping the drink.

‘I don’t know how this all functions, but it’s definitely convenient.’



The fridge could be called a subspace object transfer system, or a

dimension gate, which were somewhat complicated names. Most called it something shorter—a ‘portal’.

This mysterious technology was from the Tower. Unlike dungeons or gates where the monsters came out of, the Tower had no detrimental effects on humanity.

In fact, one could find in it mysterious technologies or artifacts that had never existed before.

“Things like this are the reason why hunters have to conquer the Tower?”

Actually, while this was technology new to Shin YuSung, who had lived his life stuck on Martial Spirits’ Mountain, it was something that the rest of humanity had already gotten used to.

As expected, only a fraction of hunters ever reached the higher floors.

‘Of course, Master had conquered 60 floors.’

Due to this, the Fist King, Yu WonHak, had bestowed many gifts to the rest of the world. One had to have achievements like that under their belt if they wanted to become the strongest hunter. But it’s too early to talk about that.

‘Let’s do the things that I can do.’

Shin YuSung checked the time using his cellphone and left the dormitory.

* * *

Like a naturally protected fortress, Gaon Academy claimed a man-made island on the ocean as its plot. While the school could look isolated, that was not the case during the weekends. One could ride an academy-operated school bus and travel through the underwater tunnel to visit [Academy City], the pride and joy of Gaon Academy.

The reason that a name like Academy City had stuck to an otherwise

normal downtown area of a city was simple.

‘Because there were over ten academies that were constructed around it.’

Because of that, various students from various academies enjoyed their weekends in Academy City, and there were some who recognized Shin YuSung among them.

“Huh!? Isn’t that Shin YuSung?”

“Whoa, the one from Gaon Academy?”

“You’re right! Shin YuSung! How can you forget a face like that?”

He was much more famous than he had thought he was due to the broadcast of his spar against Ju HaJin and the Jewel Island exam.

Murmur murmur.

Right when the murmurs of the students were reaching a fever pitch, a familiar face began to approach him in a passive manner.

“Ah, u-um...”

Hanajima Sumire.

She was the main character of an incredible reversal of fortune. From one exam, she had gone from 209th place in the student rankings to 6th place—one of the Sevens.

As he watched Sumire mumble and try to speak up, Shin YuSung decided to take the initiative.

“Should we go register first?”

“Ah! Y-yes!”

After just ten minutes.

At the Hunter Association branch established in Academy City, Shin YuSung and Sumire had shown them their student IDs and had been granted permission to participate in extracurricular activities.

Since Sumire's grades had been low until now, she had never done any extracurriculars. This was the first time that Shin YuSung had gotten any grades; this was why they had visited the Hunter Association together.

After leaving the building, Sumire gazed at her student ID as if amazed and started to mutter in a small voice.

"T-to think... that I'd get permission."

It had always been Sumire's dream to participate and earn money doing extracurriculars so that she could send her earnings back to Japan, to her family.

"U-uuu... I've always been rejected because I was in 209th place. But I passed so easily this time... I still can't believe it."

"Good for you. Your efforts paid off," Shin YuSung replied to her nonchalantly and started to walk off.

Sumire quickly caught up to him and started waving her arms in denial.

"E-efforts? What efforts! It's not like I did anything... I couldn't even catch one carbuncle with my own hands. If I didn't have Shin YuSung-ssi's hairs..."

While walking, Sumire began waxing poetic about Shin YuSung's own achievements. She even made a pledge out loud with an energetic voice and twinkling eyes—much unlike her usual demeanor.

"Even so! I promise to not be a burden to Shin YuSung-ssi during the intramurals... I'll work many times harder so that this isn't the case!"

The intramural competitions were one of the most imbalanced tests in Gaon Academy. Even though one was held at least once a year, there had never been a case where a lower-rank class had managed to beat an upper-level class.

It was near impossible for F Class, made up of F-rank Trait students, to win against A Class, which was made up of A-rank Trait students.

Even if there were students who were more skilled than their Traits would imply, it was meaningless if the average strength of the other students were low—as teamwork was important for the intramurals.

But Sumire held the belief that they could defeat any class as long as Shin YuSung was there.

“If you... are ever in a crisis during the intramural competition, I’ll try to save you even if my life depends on it...”

Sumire began fuelling her motivation with an excessive degree of loyalty.

“Yeah, let’s do our best,” replied Shin YuSung with a bemused expression.

“Hehe, got it! If you need me, call for me anytime!... Ah, Shin YuSung-ssi wouldn’t need the help of someone... like me, right? Since you’re so strong...”

Sumire finished talking and, as if too embarrassed to look at Shin YuSung directly, bowed her head again. Even though her skills were lacking, her loyalty towards Shin YuSung, who she treated as a benefactor, was higher than anyone.

Chapter 17

A scheduled meeting with the Korean branch of the Hunter Association.

The meeting room for the top-class hunters of Korea was located in the building with the best view of Sky Town.

A gorgeous view was displayed on the other side of the thick glass. Even though Kang YuChan was an old man with gray hair, he exuded mana from his entire body—as if establishing his place as the head of the Association.

“Yu WonHak...” he muttered.

Even though the hunters that had gathered in the meeting room were all widely-known active hunters in their own right, they stiffened up at the presence of the mana from Kang YuChan’s body.

But the person who had created such an atmosphere in the first place—Fist King Yu WonHak—only laughed. “Kuhuhhuh!”

As he did so, president Kang YuChan turned his head towards the other man and began to shout.

“You bastard, Yu WonHak! You made me, your comrade who went through thick and thin with you, wait over a dozen years for you?”

The other hunter had bewildered expressions on their faces at the sudden display of emotion from the usually collected Kang YuChan. But what was present in his shouting was not rage but fondness.

“Haha, sorry! I did think that I should show my face every once in a while, but I got way too into raising YuSung!”

“You call that an excuse, you asshole?!”

Despite Kang YuChan's grouchy words, he couldn't hide the happiness that had crept into his expression.

The two giants of the hunter world looked at each other and began to laugh; the other hunters in the meeting room started to fidget and catch each other's looks.

In fact, the subject of the meeting was the [Academy Dungeon Raid Competition] event that was being hosted by the Association.

The hunters had gathered here so that they could recommend any students that had caught their eye during the meeting that was going to be held. But Yu WonHak had, essentially, cut in line.

"YuChan-ah. Can an old friend make a request?"

At that one phrase, the atmosphere of the room became frosty. But there was not a single hunter brave enough to speak up against Yu WonHak. More than anything else, Yu WonHak was an irreplaceable friend to the person on the highest rung of the Association, Kang YuChan.

"Wahaha... sure! Go ahead! I'm the president of the Association; there's nothing I can't do!"

It was an act of suicide for any run-of-the-mill hunter to oppose him. Yu WonHak scanned the room, looking over the other occupants.

"For the raid competition that's going to be held soon... I want to know what artifacts have been hidden in which dungeons in advance."

"For your disciple, right?"

"Yeah. The Black Dragon's Hide was an artifact that I provided to the Hunter Association in the first place. There's no problem in YuSung taking it back with him, right?"

Kang YuChan began to show some interest at Yu WonHak's words.

"You really are doting on him, how unlike you. Is it because he's your

first disciple?”

“What, are you finally getting curious about him?”

Yu WonHak’s words were playful.

But the response that Kang YuChan gave him had the other hunters freeze in their spots.

“I am. I’ll have to take a look at this disciple myself since you treasure him so much.”

It was no small news for Kang YuChan, someone who was rarely seen even during Association events, to personally visit the Academy.

The Academy City branch manager, Mei Lin, eventually stepped in and tried to discourage him.

“B-but Mr. President... he is just a student! If the president of the Association is seen with him, there will definitely be an uproar...”

But Kang YuChan lightly waved off Mei Lin’s concerns.

“Wahaha! Talk about too much racket around someone who’s just visiting his friend’s disciple! I’ll be back quickly. Don’t worry about it!”

Fist King Yu WonHak.

President Kang YuChan.

The hunters gathered at the meeting place started thinking to themselves as the two strongest hunters of South Korea showed interest in the same student.

‘So he’s *that* promising?’

‘If I get closer to that student, I can make connections to Fist King-nim through him.’

‘Maybe I should send a scout after him?’

It was the moment when, despite being a first-year student, the name of Shin YuSung was etched into the minds of top-class hunters.

* * *

The peaceful newsroom of K Channel.

Yu HanNah looked like she was in a good mood, as her stories on Shin YuSung had continuously brought in high ratings.

“Jurutjurujaja~”

As if to prove it, she hummed a weird melody under her breath. She sucked a mouthful of fresh fruit juice through a straw. But just as she did so...

Bam!

“Breaking news! Breaking news!”

The head producer rushed into the waiting room while slamming the doors open. Yu HanNah, surprised, spit out the juice in her mouth.

“H-hack! Gag! Hey—cough! Producer-nim! W-what’s the big deal, so suddenly?”

Yu HanNah spent a good while coughing, then wiped her nose with a tissue and started to glare at the other person.

“...Shit! Some strawberry seeds flew out of my nose.”

Her expression was one of complete annoyance. But the head producer ignored her and began to desperately wave his arms.



“Hey! The strawberry seeds are not the problem right now!”

“...If what you brought with you isn't important, I'm going to stuff

this tissue I wiped my nose with down your gullet. You understand?”

The head producer took a step back at Yu HanNah’s threat as she started waving the tissue at him. Words began falling rapid-fire out of his mouth.

“The Fist King Yu WonHak and President Kang YuChan! The heads of the hunter world are traveling to Gaon Academy right now!”

“No way, really?” Yu HanNah asked with a shocked expression on her face.

“Really!” replied the head producer with a sincere expression on their face.

One of the hunters who had participated in the meeting had given them the tip. Of course, the head producer did not hear the reason as to why those two were going to the academy, but Yu HanNah was quick on the uptake.

“...Yu WonHak and Kang YuChan at Gaon Academy? No matter how you see it, this combination of people definitely means that they’re going to visit Shin YuSung, right? Right! Since he’s the disciple of Yu WonHak!”

Words began to fall out of Yu HanNah’s mouth rapid-fire as well. The head producer pointed at the tissue in her hand with his finger. With a livid expression, she threw it in the trash can.

“Tch, I’ll admit it’s big!”

The head producer gave Yu HanNah a smug smile.

“What are you doing, just sitting here? Gather up a crew and make your way there!”

At the head producer’s words, Yu HanNah and other top employees of the news station gathered up their equipment and prepared to leave. They had another piece of news that Yu WonHak and Kang YuChan didn’t know...

It was also the day of the spar between Shin YuSung and Park SuHyun.

* * *

An official spar with a staggering 150SP (School Points) on the line. Even though Park SuHyun had looked down on the F-rank Shin YuSung in front of Kim EunAh, he ended up thoroughly preparing for the match.

“All of the settings have been prepared just as I asked, right?” Park SuHyun asked while adjusting his glasses with a finger.

Nod.

A man in formal wear with the presence of an underling hurriedly took out a carefully bundled armband from his coat pocket.

“Yes, young master! This is the item you requested!”

Instead of a response, Park SuHyun placed the black band around his wrist.

Clack.

The band that he had ordered looked plain, but its effects were amazing.

[Rechargeable Portable Shield]

A shield barrier that even hunters on active duty used was installed onto the armband.

It was an item that could block a good portion of attacks from monsters, provided that the wearer had enough mana.

‘You aren’t allowed to use artifacts during a spar, but the rules don’t say anything about Hunting Gear.’

Smirk.

Park SuHyun began to laugh as he stared at the band around his wrist. No one had ever brought Hunting Gear, which were worth hundreds of millions of won, to a spar before. Park SuHyun took advantage of that oversight.

‘Even if he manages to close the distance, the portable shield can block him, and that’s that.’

Park SuHyun arrogantly placed his feet on the office desk. Right then, the phone in his pocket began to vibrate.

“Ah~ professor! This is Park SuHyun speaking!”

He answered the call, a smile spread over his face. On the other end of the call, the voice of a timid man rang out.

–Y-yes! I... chose the arena that you told me to pick. The money will be wired right away, right? As you promised?”

Park SuHyun snickered, mocking the other man. As he did so, the phone in his hand vibrated, and a message appeared.

[The location of the match has been decided!]

[Time: 1:00PM]

[Location: 4th Sparring Arena (Ocean Dome)]

Park SuHyun had consulted with the professor in advance to choose a stage that was advantageous to him. While the arena was supposed to be chosen randomly for the sake of fairness, Park SuHyun had the weapon called money on his side.

“Yes~ professor~ thank you very much. My secretary will deposit the cash right away.”

After saying that, he ended the call without even listening to the other

man's reply. With a cocky expression, he slowly rose from the chair.

“As expected...”

Park SuHyun took off the glasses he was wearing. His complexion was something that could be called handsome, even at first glance. A cruel smirk appeared on his face.

“One has to use both his head and money.”

* * *

Ten minutes before the start of the match.

Shin YuSung watched the clear water flowing around the swimming pool, fascinated.

‘So Gaon Academy owns five sparring arenas just as big as this one?’

No two hunters had the same Trait, and among them were many with unique strengths.

Gaon Academy's five sparring arenas were fittingly diverse.

‘The place where I'm going to fight against Park SuHyun is... ’

The 4th Ocean Dome sparring arena.

It was a location where yellow buoys were spread out across a gigantic pool large enough that it wouldn't be a surprise to see a killer whale show being hosted there.

Splaaash!

On top of that, man-made waves would periodically rock the buoys.

‘If I land on one of them too hard... I'll probably fall in.’

To a fighter like Shin YuSung, who primarily used his own body to fight, an arena like the Ocean Dome was much too disadvantageous for him.

‘I won’t be able to expend much power, either... ’

Shin YuSung tried to analyze the arena in the scant amount of time he had. Right then, the doors to the arena slammed open.

“So this is the place the news channel is gonna be covering?”

“Sure is. To be honest, I don’t think watching this is going to let us get a good grasp of their combat abilities...”

Leading the D Class students were the ones who Shin YuSung had helped on Jewel Island—Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun.

“Hey, it’s YuSung!”

“S-Shin YuSung-ssi!... I’m here, too!”

Right after—Lee SiWoo, who was flippantly waving his arm, and Sumire, who was carefully gathering her courage, entered the arena with the other F Class students.

But the stream of students did not end there. Even those considered the elites of Gaon, the A Class students, confidently strutted in.

The D Class and F Class students shared glances with each other.

“It’s A Class...”

“Are they here because of Park SuHyun?”

Of course, among the A Class students, the one who stood out the most was the annoyed face and crossed arms of Kim EunAh in the middle of the group.

“Ugh, this sucks. It’s too damp here! I think I can smell the rank

water...”

Second place in the first year students rankings in South Korea’s top academy, Gaon. On top of that, she was the granddaughter of the CEO of the Shinsung group—the greatest corporation in the nation.

It was obvious that, even among these elite A Class students, she was their leader.

Plop.

Kim EunAh sat on one of the front-row seats with one leg crossed over another. She tossed her hair behind her and smirked.

“Why don’t we go ahead and watch his third-rate skills?”

But the subject of focus during this match was not the loudly boasting Kim EunAh.

Bam!

The doors to the arena opened again, and Yu HanNah rushed towards it with the news crew. A flurry of questions was aimed at the people who entered.

Fist King Yu WonHak and Association President Kang YuChan.

The sparring arena was swept up in shock as the two larger-than-life figures arrived to watch Shin YuSung.

Chapter 18

The previous Sevens' Park SuHyun had finished his preparations; he leisurely strode out of the waiting room, located in the back of the building, into the arena.

He had the advantages of an arena filled with water and an armband-shaped portable shield that would block physical attacks.

‘Hah, maybe I prepared too many things against an F-rank?’

Filled with confidence, Park SuHyun scanned the audience seats with a grin. The first things that caught his eyes were F Class and D Class, the ones he called garbage. Next were the A Class students, which included student ranking 2 Kim EunAh.

But one thing that was odd to him was their reactions.

‘What are they looking at?’

All of the students in the audience either turned their heads away or stared at something with stupid expressions on their faces. That, of course, included the haughty Kim EunAh.

Park SuHyun slowly turned his head towards the entrance of the sparring arena, where everyone's gazes were pointed to.

There stood a muscular hunter who has brazenly crossing his arms—Fist King Yu WonHak.

Beside him stood a hunter with long, white hair like an ascetic who was laughing—Hunter Association president Kang YuChan.

Park SuHyun's brain crashed at the sight of those two legends looking down at him and Shin YuSung.

“T-this is crazy...”

For what reason did these hunters, called the greatest of South Korea, come to the Academy to watch what amounted to children fighting?

Park SuHyun just barely hid his shock and stepped on top of a buoy.

Wobble.

It was easy to lose your balance even to a small mistake in movements on the water’s surface.

‘It’s an incredibly disadvantageous field to him... but it’s most advantageous for me.’

Park SuHyun gritted his teeth and glared at Shin YuSung.

‘So I must... Must...! Defeat him!’

The scale of the fight had grown way larger than what Park SuHyun had expected it to. If that news channel had come there to film the Fist King and the president, it was a given that the result of the spar would be aired as well.

There was no humiliation worse than losing to Shin YuSung, an F-rank.

“It’s been a while since he’s visited you, aren’t you glad to see him? Don’t worry too much; I’ll make you say uncle before long.’

Park SuHyun snickered while glaring at his opponent, but Shin YuSung was not affected by his taunts.

Flap.

In lieu of a reply, Shin YuSung took off his jacket and threw it away. Sumire, who was situated below him, stammered “uh, uh, uh—” in an odd manner but caught the article of clothing rather smoothly.

Park SuHyun clicked his tongue and laughed condescendingly at his opponent.

A tension stretched between the two men as they sized each other up. As Shin YuSung and Park SuHyun finished their preparations...

Instructor Lin Xiao, who had been waiting for them, began to referee.

“Are y-you two ready?”

It seemed like even he was prone to getting nervous and stumbling over his words in the presence of the Fist King and the Association president.

“Yes, I’m ready.”

Shin YuSung replied to him in a respectful manner. Park SuHyun, however, did not forget to ridicule Shin YuSung, even towards the end.

“Why should I need to get ready for fighting against an F-rank...”

Lin Xiao straightened his neck and began to hurriedly recite his speech, posture stiffer than usual.

“G-good! Then I will begin the countdown! The medical nanomachines that the Academy has are ready to do their work. Please fight with no reservations!”

– The match will begin shortly.

Shin YuSung lowered his stance and rebalanced his core as the announcement rang from the speaker.

“Kuhaha! YuSung-ah! Let’s see how much your skills have improved!” The Fist King yelled in a simpleminded manner, which made Lin Xiao flinch for no reason. Park SuHyun fingered the armband on his wrist.

– Ready!

Shin YuSung coiled his body like a taut rubber band. Park SuHyun lifted both hands in preparation of using his Trait.

– Begin!

The two made their move at the same instant that the signal was given from the speaker.

“Watch this, F-rank! This is the power of an A-rank Trait!”

Park SuHyun swung his right hand at Shin YuSung. As he did so, the water in the pool suddenly flew towards him.

Roar! Bam!

Of course, the spray of water was moving much too slow to Shin YuSung, who had heightened his concentration.

Tap!

Only the innocent buoy was hit by the water, and it sank into the pool. Park SuHyun took the time that he had gained to use one of his ‘Skills’—a blessing from his Trait.

[Swell of the Sea God]

The water in the pool crested and created a giant wave behind Park SuHyun. He possessed the power of an A-rank Trait that controlled water. A sparring arena filled to the brim with water like the Ocean Dome was nothing more than a playground for Park SuHyun.

“How’s that? Despair! This is the power of an A-rank Trait! Now sink!”

Park SuHyun waved his hand. The yellow buoy that Shin YuSung was standing on top of looked feeble in the face of the gigantic wave of water rushing towards him.

‘So it’s a Trait related to water.’

Despite it all, there was not a single speck of fear in Shin YuSung's eyes. Instead, he clenched his fist and waited as if looking for something.

‘Just a little more.’

As he started to focus on the situation, time rapidly slowed down. Of course, that hadn't actually happened, but Shin YuSung's heightened concentration had sped up his processing powers.

‘A little more.’

Shin YuSung continued to wait while watching the slow wave of water about to engulf him.

He gathered mana in his right hand in preparation for the perfect timing.

To others, it was only a moment.

But Shin YuSung stretched his hand towards the wave over a long period of time.

‘Now!’

Green Dragon's Heavenly Ascent

It was a technique that the Fist King had devised in order to attack with enough power to rival a Trait through training his body. Shin YuSung had not even taken a day to learn it.

This was due to his inborn physique and talent, of course, but his F-rank Trait that boosted his concentration had helped as well.

Splash! Boom!

Shin YuSung's mana met the giant swell. The wide range and power of the Green Dragon's Heavenly Ascent managed to change the direction of the wave.

“Keuk!”

Park SuHyun used his control over water to move his buoy backward, but still got swept by the aftermath.

“...An F-rank like him managed to deflect my technique?” he muttered in surprise.

* * *

A sound emitted from Shin YuSung’s fist.

Cccrack!

It was the chilling clack of bones clattering against each other. Park SuHyun nervously gulped as he watched his opponent.

F-rank Traits were known as the weakest.

Even so, Shin YuSung had shown strength that had matched—no—surpassed him.

“How is this possible...”

Terror filled the shocked Park SuHyun’s eyes. Shin YuSung did not miss the opportunity.

Tup! Flit!

A spray of water flew in the air. At the same instant, Shin YuSung appeared right in front of Park SuHyun.

“Wh-when did he!”

Shocked, the boy tried to use his Trait, but his opponent did not give him the opportunity to retaliate.

Battle God Style First Form – Falling Moon Kick

Drawing a curve with his leg, Shin YuSung's kick flew towards Park SuHyun's face.

Voom!

Right when everyone in the arena was certain of Shin YuSung's victory.

Crack!

Shin YuSung's foot was blocked in midair. A sound like the cracking of glass emanated from it.

Vween!

Park SuHyun had activated the shield in his armband."Hahaha! Y-you d-didn't! Know about this, huh?!"

Tup!

Park SuHyun used the opportunity to widen the distance between him and his opponent. Sweat beaded on his spooked face, in contrast to his usual aloof expression.

"This is the actual end!"

[Dance of the Water Dragon]

As it was his last chance to retaliate, Park SuHyun used all of the mana in his body to fuel this Skill. The water in the pool reacted to his mana and shaped itself into the form of a dragon.

And as the Skill was completed—

Pshhhh!

—The water dragon faced Shin YuSung and roared.



“H-how’s that? Surrender! You fought well for the likes of an F-rank, but... I have a shield with me...”

Lin Xiao, who had been watching the spar, started yelling at Park SuHyun.

“Park SuHyun! How dare you bring hunting gear into a fair match!”

The boy glanced at Lin Xiao and adjusted his glasses with his middle finger. It seemed to be a habit of his.

“...What’s the problem, Instructor? Look at the rules. There’s nothing prohibiting the use of hunting gear in a sparring arena.”

Park Suhyun continued his reply in a casual manner.

“I’m just doing whatever I need to do in order to give my all... Is that not what’s happening?”

“T-that’s!”

Speechless, Lin Xiao scrunched up his expression.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Shin YuSung to the other boy.

“...What?”

Twitch.

Park SuHyun petted the water dragon hovering around him while showing his opponent his other wrist.

A shield.

It was a piece of hunting gear that could block physical hits as long as it was charged. Park SuHyun began explaining as if he was thinking that YuSung didn’t know about it.

“So you aren’t aware of the situation. This armband has a shield that c...”

“I said it doesn’t matter.”

Shin YuSung cut his opponent off with a grave expression, then took his stance.

‘...W-why isn’t this guy getting worked up?’

Park SuHyun, who had been backing up until then, lifted both of his hands as if making up his mind.

‘But it’s not like my advantage has changed!’

Splaaaash!

The water dragon roared once more then flew towards Shin YuSung. Fuelled by mana, the whirlpools created on the dragon’s surface could easily shred through trees.

But when the dragon was a hair’s breadth away from Shin YuSung, his body dissipated like a shadow getting hit by a ray of light.

Shadowed Moon Steps

It was one of the techniques that the Fist King had taught him.

Park SuHyun belatedly realized what had happened, but by then, Shin YuSung had already closed the distance between them.

“I-I have a shield...!” he yelled, as if facing off against the grim reaper.

Instead of a reply, Shin YuSung stretched out his palm towards the other boy.

Battle God Style – Savage Dragon’s Boulder Crushing Palm

Bababaabam! Crack!

A huge whirlwind of mana arose. The shield that Park SuHyun had bragged about so much had crumbled into nothing in an instant.

Boom!

Park SuHyun was shredded by the continuously whirling mana and flew outside of the sparring arena in a bloody mess.

Lin Xiao, in a state of shock, took a second to perform his job as the referee.

“W-winner! Shin YuSung! The match is over!”

The cries of the F Class students swept over the arena.

“He won! YuSung won!”

Lee SiWoo high-fived his classmates while shouting Shin YuSung’s name; even the students that had never talked to him before were chanting the boy’s name.

Someone with an F-rank Trait beating someone with an A-rank Trait had given the F Class students the courage to believe that they could also do so.

“He won against an A Class student all by himself!”

“So even someone with an F-rank Trait can do it!”

Their opponents for the intramural competition, D Class, were shaking in fear of Shin YuSung.

“So he really did decimate Ju HaJin...”

“That’s insane. You can’t win against him.”

“You said we should come here to gauge his strength! Shit, this just lowered our morale instead!”

The arena fell into chaos in an instant.

The Fist King laughed boisterously as if showing his satisfaction towards Shin YuSung’s match.

“Kuhaha! How dare he make his precious master wait like this!”

“Master!”

Shin YuSung was wholly delighted with the reunion. President Kang YuChan gave a content smile while watching the two.

“Yu WonHak. I’ll consider taking a look at YuSung at your request.”

Shin YuSung’s exploit was properly etched into the Association president’s eyes. It was a fortuitous opportunity for any hunter.

“Hm.”

Kim WunAh rose from her seat and watched Park SuHyun get carried away in a stretcher. With a pale hand, she tossed her hair.

“How amusing.”

This was her brief impression.

Kim EunAh confidently strode away, marking that as the end of her words. The A Class students followed her unthinkingly.

Chapter 19

On the way back to the dorms.

Shin YuSung was silently walking to the dorms while trying to organize the whirlwind of a day in his mind.

Flanking him were Sumire and Lee SiWoo. The three were connected together by the common thread of being in F Class. Lee SiWoo was shouting about what he had witnessed at the sparring arena as if still overwhelmed by it.

“The two living legends were there! And I got to see them with my own eyes!”

He was so excited that he started to babble. Sumire quickened her strides to match Shin YuSung’s own.

“You won against an A Class student. S-Shin YuSung-ssi, you really are... incredible.”

Peek.

While saying this, Sumire was staring at Shin YuSung’s hair like it was made of gold.

Whenever his hair occasionally fell on the ground, Sumire would pick it up and store it in her pocket, treating it like a precious treasure.

“If we have YuSung, who knows, even our F Class might be able to escape the benign last place during the intramurals!”

No matter how many years had passed after Gaon Academy had been established, F Class always managed to claim last place.

Of course, every once in a while an exceptional student was born out

of F Class. But it was never enough to close the gap between it and the other classes.

Each class had 30 students.

There was a difference in overall skill that one student could not make up for.

Only the competition between the most skilled classes, S Class and A Class, could be called something of a close fight. Depending on what strategies were used, the upper-rank class fights occasionally produced unbelievably high-level matches.

On the flip side, the intramural exam was nothing but a history of failure for the lower rank classes. Lee SiWoo stared at Shin YuSung with glittering eyes.

“I believe in you, YuSung!”

Sumire also carefully opened her mouth.

“I-I... also believe in you, YuSung-ssi!” she said, glancing at him.

“Thank you,” Shin YuSung replied in a composed manner. He began thinking about the intramural competition. Shin YuSung had a pretty good idea of the skill levels of the Gaon students after finishing his match with the previous ‘Seven’, Park SuHyun.

‘...The biggest problem is the fact that there are 30 students per class. It’s nearly impossible for me to fight against all of them by myself.’

Even in A Class, 2nd in student ranking Kim EunAh was holding the fort. And what would happen if the skilled A Class students supported her?

The F Class students that Shin YuSung had seen during classes popped into his mind—they were all severely lacking proficiency in how they used their Traits.

Even if they all had F-rank Traits, there was a wide range of

proficiency depending on how efficiently those Traits were trained.

‘But it’s not like I can train every single member of the class.’

There was a limit to how much time Shin YuSung could use to prepare for the intramurals.

‘What I need right now are a few people who can watch my back...’

Finishing his musings, Shin YuSung looked at Lee SiWoo and Sumire.

“Our next opponents are D Class, right?” he said.

“Hm? Yeah.”

Lee SI Woo glanced at Sumire as if looking for confirmation. Sumire opted to nod her head instead of opening her mouth.

Seeing the two respond, Shin YuSung smiled.

“I’ll make it so that we can defeat D Class. No, all of the lower rank classes.”

Those weren’t empty words.

Shin YuSung had the opportunity to observe the skills of Park SuHyun, an A Class student and a previous ‘Seven’. On top of that, Shin YuSung’s current student ranking was 3rd place—he was one of the top students—a Seven—of the Academy.

“R-really!?”

“Oooh! Nice! Nice!”

Sumire and Lee SiWoo’s eyes were sparkling.

“But, for this to happen, you guys are going to have to get stronger,” Shin YuSung continued while maintaining his smile.

Shin YuSung remembered every last bit of the torturous training that the Fist King had subjected him to over the years. It was a simple task to train these two.

“You can do it, right?”

Lee SiWoo and Sumire, for whatever reason, felt a chill crawl up their spines at the pleasant expression that Shin YuSung’s wore as he asked this question.

* * *

Academy City’s Hunter Association branch.

The Association president, Kang YuChan, took the chance to visit one of the branches while returning from his visit to Gaon Academy. Mei Lin dropped everything that she was doing to greet him.

“Mr. President? For what occasion...”

“Kukuku, I just thought I would drop by since I was in the area. I saw something incredible... but it turns out that there’s no one to talk about it with, hm?”

Quick on the uptake, Mei Lin nodded at Kang YuChan’s boisterous laugh.

“It looks like you’ve taken quite a liking to the Fist King’s disciple.”

“I’ve seen a lot of hunters in my time, but this is... the first that I’ve seen combat skills like that. Especially... how he utilizes his Trait!”

The F-rank Trait that Shin YuSung possessed was called [Heightened Concentration]. Kang YuChan was highly impressed by the methods Shin YuSung employed in its usage.

Ranks for Trait were, at the end of the day, decided by the standards set by the Association. An S rank could be given to a Trait like Adela’s, which converted mana into ice. An A rank could be given to a Trait like Kim EunAh’s, which turned mana into powerful electricity but

was harder to control depending on the user's emotions.

The Association's own rules and the device that scanned Traits were what decided which Trait was better or worse than another.

Those standards were not absolute. Therefore, how one used a Trait changed its effectiveness, even an F-rank one.

"Heightened Concentration... he managed to bring out a hundred times, no, a thousand times the power of a seemingly meager Trait, and he can control his mana to a degree which regular hunters couldn't hope to achieve." Kang YuChan remarked further while looking back on Shin YuSung's fight.

A graying old man like Kang YuChan looked as excited as a little kid when the topic of hunters was brought up.

"He utilized all of the senses in his body during the fight!... Now that I think about it, how did that child manage to pass the training from the Fist King when even S-ranks couldn't do so?"

Mei Lin muttered the name of the Trait that Shin YuSung possessed as the man asked the question.

"Concentration..."

"Correct. He overcame his limits through his Trait. Due to it, he could endure Yu WonHak's training and managed to evolve his Trait."

As Yu WonHak had said.

Shin YuSung did not need a moment to consciously use his Trait. In order to survive Yu WonHak's training, his Trait had to continuously surpass its own limits. It had eventually turned into something as natural as breathing.

Kang YuChan had managed to fully analyze Shin YuSung after watching him fight only one spar.

"A device probably can't pick it up, but he probably has something

other than an F-rank Trait...”

Mei Lin looked interested in Kang YuChan’s explanation.

“I thought that evolving one’s Trait was only something that... hunter who cleared dungeons or the Tower could achieve.”

“Well, that’s how it usually goes. It’s rare for students to experience true danger. Speaking of...”

Kang YuChan continued talking to Mei Lin with an unusually serious tone.

“Can you, the manager of the Academy City branch, keep an eye out for him and report back to me if anything strange happens?”

“Yes, I understand.”

“And about the Dungeon Raid Competition we’re hosting...”

Kang YuChan turned a mana-filled gaze towards Mei Lin, who flinched. There was a pressure exuding from the glare of one of the strongest hunters in the world.



He continued calmly.

“...It looks like the dungeon where the Silver Moon Blade is in is

rather advantageous for the Chinese team. Huh huh, it's probably a coincidence, right?"

"I-I apologize! T-that's..."

Mei Lin had accepted a certain kind of trade with the headmaster of Skyscraper Academy. In exchange for Mei Lin, the Academy City branch manager, 'slightly tipping of the scales' in their favor, she could obtain a large sum of money.

"I get it. You want to give more opportunities to the standout students. In fact, I actually went and gave Yu WonHak some insider info as well! It happens, it happens! Huh huh!"

Kang YuChan laughed, "huh huh!" with his hands behind his back—a typical reaction from him. ,

In a cold sweat, Mei Lin bowed her head.

Kang YuChan looked down at the woman and began to make a request with a distinctly colder voice.

"But still, it's a competition hosted by the Association. Shouldn't the president, at the very least, be notified about any circumstances that come to pass in it?"

"I will keep that in mind for next time."

"Kuku, don't get too bothered about it. It's just the teasing of an old man."

With his hands still behind his back, Kang YuChan strode out of the Association building.

"Phew..."

Only then did Mei Lin relax. She let out her held breath.

"To think that President-nim is taking interest in a first-year

student...”

He had initially sought out Shin YuSung out of curiosity because of his title as the Fist King’s disciple, but the boy’s skill was what had entirely captivated the man.

Mei Lin sat on the chair and crossed one leg over the other. Her cheongsam followed the curve of her hips and legs.

“...Shin YuSung, huh.”

Mei Lin put the boy’s name on the Academy City list of individuals to watch out for.

* * *

An unfamiliar ceiling in Gaon Academy.

Park SuHyun strained his heavy body and sat up. He placed his palms on his head to quell the headache and tried to organize his memories.

What was certain was that he had lost against Shin YuSung during the match. And he was sitting on one of the infirmary’s beds.

‘This is the infirmary... ’

This was the first time that this had happened to Park SuHyun since he had enrolled in the academy. It was rare for someone with Sevens-level skill like him to be so thoroughly beaten that he had to be shipped off to the infirmary.

But Park SuHyun had been thoroughly beaten.

‘I lost... to an F-rank?’

It was hard to believe.

Park SuHyun’s Trait, which controlled power, could be exercised to its full potential in a setting like a pool filled with water. On top of that,

he had snuck in the shield hunting gear to the match.

Even with all of that, he had lost to Shin YuSung because of the overwhelming difference in skill.

“Ggh...”

Park SuHyun grabbed his shoulder.

Even though the nanomachines finished his treatment, he could still feel the pain of the blow. Park SuHyun had ruined a lot of things for himself by losing to Shin YuSung. If he had won against him, he would’ve been about to make a strong impression on the Shinsung group’s granddaughter, Kim EunAh. He also would have been able to earn back the honor of a ‘previous Seven’.

‘...But everything got messed up.’

Grind—

Park SuHyun gritted his teeth in rage.

It wasn’t his style to take things lying down. Even if he had to cheat, even if he was insulted, he used every method possible to get revenge. That was his style.

‘F Class... ’

Park SuHyun, with a grimace, started to think. How could he use his wealth and status to deal a blow against Shin YuSung?

‘I need to knock that smug asshole down a peg or two, no matter what... ’

Standing up from the bed, Park SuHyun smirked as if remembering something.

‘Come to think of it; there are the intramurals... ’

As his thoughts reached that point, a face appeared in his mind—a way to enact revenge without dirtying his own hands. That was Park SuHyun's specialty.

Chapter 20

First place in the student rankings of Gaon. The strongest first-year student who was often talked about, Adela Ortensia.

She stood in a dungeon not far from Academy City.

[Flaming Volcano Cave]

As implied by the name, the monsters appearing in this dungeon had fire affinities and were around rank three. However, all that currently existed in the cave was frigid ice.

“...Clear.”

Adela’s emotionless voice rang throughout the cave. The companions who had accompanied her to the raid had expressions of shock on their faces while staring at the ice.

“As expected of Adela...”

One of those companions was a fellow S Class student with a bob cut, Lee ChaeHyun.

“We didn’t even get to do anything. Is it fine for us to get paid?”

The boy laughing awkwardly was another S Class student, Min SungHyuk. Adela did not reply to either of them—her personality was as cold and blunt as her ice Trait.

But even to that Adela, there was a person from the Academy that managed to earn her interest.

‘...So that man eventually ended up getting to participate in the competition.’

[Academy Dungeon Raid Competition]

Hosted by the Association, it was an event that geniuses from around the world competed in. Even among them, the students from Gaon Academy were always a hot topic.

The ones who were going to represent Gaon, if all went according to plan, were supposed to be Adela and Kim EunAh. But the headmaster, Jin ByungCheol, had chosen Shin YuSung.

‘...Shin YuSung. Does he think that this man has more potential?’

Adela slowly closed her eyes.

‘I’ll have to check him myself.’

Her long eyelashes lowered. As she did so, the ice around her shattered.

Crack! Crack! Shatter!

The monsters that had been frozen like statues turned into dust. Adela turned her back towards the frozen Burning Volcano Cave and leisurely strode out.

“Wow...”

“Even the same S-ranks seem like they’re on a different level compared to Adela, huh?”

Min SungHyuk and Lee ChaeHyun, impressed, started to perform the cleanup. While they were doing so, Adela took out a square hot pack from her armband-shaped Pocket.

Rub.

She fed mana to the military-grade hot pack and rubbed her hands against it. The hot pack immediately heated up and started radiating warmth.

Adela gently warmed up her hands with the hot pack. Even though her Trait let her control ice, her hometown was Florence—a city known for being especially hot, even in Italy. Because of this, she did not like the cold.

Rub rub.

‘...It’s warm.’

Adela warmed her hands with the same expressionless face as before.



* * *

Lunchtime for Gaon Academy.

Shin YuSung sat on a bench that overlooked a lake. He was going over the information that Kang YuChan had given him.

[The 4th Dungeon]

[Name: Graveyard of Despair]

[Difficulty: Highest]

[Reward: Black Dragon's Hide (Artifact)]

[Types of monsters...]

The data written was fairly basic, but it was clear what the Fist King wanted Shin YuSung to do. He wanted the boy to collect artifacts to prepare for raiding the Tower.

‘...The Black Dragon's Hide.’

Among those, the Black Dragon's Hide had a special connection to the Fist King.

‘It was the artifact that Master acquired after conquering the 30th floor.’

The one who had won the Black Dragon's Hide from the Tower was the Fist King, and the power that it bestowed upon its user happened to be a great fit for a martial artist like him.

‘Master is a retired hunter, so he doesn't need it anymore, but... ’

It was an indispensable artifact to Shin YuSung, who had inherited the Fist King's techniques as his disciple.

‘...But, a minimum of 3 people are needed for the raid.’

Even excluding the party leader, two other members were needed. Shin YuSung stared at the grass next to the bench where Lee SiWoo and Sumire were enjoying a picnic on a picnic mat.

“Wow! You made this?”

“I-it’s not much! Just... a bunch of dishes... that anyone can make.”

Since she had become a Seven, Sumire no longer had any issue with her tuition or cost of living. Until now, though, the extravagant cafeteria and its equally extravagant fees were too intimidating for her, so she made her own lunches.

Possibly due to this, or because she had experience taking care of her younger siblings back in Japan, her cooking skills were outstanding.

Glance.

Sumire glanced at Shin YuSung out of the corner of her eye for a long moment. Finally, she deftly picked up a piece of fried chicken with her chopsticks.

“U-um... Shin YuSung-ssi, would you like to try one? It’s called karaage, it’s tastier than it—”

“No, it’s fine.”

But Shin YuSung cut through Sumire’s offer like a knife. Her shoulders seemed to sag more than usual at his response. Remembering the information about the Graveyard of Despair that he had read about earlier, Shin YuSung followed up with a question.

“Sumire. Can you go into more detail about your Trait, including your Skills?”

As he did so, a healthy glow returned to her face.

“Eh? Eh! I-it isn’t... much, really... but if Shin YuSung-ssi is curious...”

The name of the Trait that Sumire possessed was rather bombastic, [Controller of the Undead].

It was, of course, F-rank. The reason for its low ranking was most likely due to its low versatility.

Because of this, Sumire's Skills were heavily restricted.

[Skeleton Summon]

A Skill that summoned a skeleton through a contract that involves a part of one's body, such as hair or fingernails.

[Familiar]

A Skill that could summon small animals as spirit familiars that she could control.

[Call of the Undead]

And the last Skill let her use her own mana to control undead monsters and creatures.

It was a powerful Skill at first glance, but in reality, there were little to no situations in the Academy where one had to fight against the undead. Therefore, it merely sat there looking pretty.

But Shin YuSung, thinking about the monsters in the dungeon that he had read about earlier, could find the potential in her powers.

‘...So ranks are definitely not all there is to a Trait.’

Ultimately, Traits were as good as one made of them.

“I’ll keep relying on you in the future, Sumire,” he said while grinning at her.

Sumire, with a blush, nodded her head in lieu of a reply.

* * *

[First-year – D Class]

The D Class students were holding a discussion with each other in preparation for the intramurals. The ones with the most sway among them were, of course, the students who had the highest rankings in the class. Ju HaJin was one of the three included in that group.

“Ha, see this? Even an A Class lost to Shin YuSung during the spar. Of course I got defeated,” he confidently stated.

As if annoyed, the female student next to him grimaced and adjusted her glasses.

“So what? Do you want to be complimented or something?”

Her name was So HaWon. She was the class president of D Class and the highest in the student rankings in the classroom at 20th place.

At her words, Ju Hajin slammed down his fists on the desk and stood up.

“Just saying shit with your mouth, huh, you piece of...”

“Hey, settle down, HaJin-ah.”

As he did so, Kang MinSu next to him smiled at Ju Hajin through his closed eyes in an effort to placate the other boy. Unlike his tone, though, Kang MinSu had a tight hold on Ju HaJin’s shoulder.

Ju Hajin glared at So HaWon then sank back into his seat as if it couldn’t be helped.

The D Class students.

The ones who had high enough grades to do the extracurriculars were especially on edge.

The class president, So HaWon, coldly looked at the other D Class students and began to speak.

“You know what will happen if we get last place in the intramurals,

right?”

Extra classes after school to raise their abilities.

Forbidden from going out on the weekend to bolster their competitiveness. There were a great variety of penalties for being last place in a skill-based meritocratic school like Gaon, but even among those was a penalty worse than all the others.

Being forbidden from participating in extracurricular activities for a month.

“Me and Kang MinSu have a request to do next week. If we lost to F Class and got last place...”

So HaWon sighed. Kang MinSu opened his mouth.

“We’d have to cancel it. Returning the request fee is a given. Hm, and our standings in the Hunter Association would... haha, they’d fall a lot, huh.”

“...Are you really laughing at a time like this?”

Kang MinSu’s easygoing smile didn’t falter, even at So HaWon’s scathing question.

“Calm down, HaWon-ah. Have you forgotten why F Class has been last in the intramurals all this time?”

The ones who said this were Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun.

These students were the ones saved by Shin YuSung on Jewel Island when they were surrounded by salamanders.

Jin MinAh began trying to convince the class president, So HaWon.

“There are 30 students in one class. We have to use those numbers to our advantage. So give me operational authority.”

Only 3 students could have authority during the intramurals. In D Class, So HaWon and Kang MinSu were already secured for two of those spots. Only one spot was left.

“Do you think you’ll perform well in this role?” asked the class president.

Jin MinAh nodded.

“Yeha, IkHyun will help me.”

Among the mostly agreeable mood, Ju HaJin was the sole person with a displeased expression on his face.

“Hey... prez, what the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Skid.

Ju HaJin rose from his seat once more while pushing his table aside. He grit his teeth and glared at So HaWon.

“Based on grades, the last spot should definitely go to me!”

So HaWon laughed at his declaration.

“Pfft. Says who? The one who chooses is me, the class president.”

“You son of a...”

Ju HaJin was shaking on the spot, fist clenched. However, So HaWon wasn’t even looking in his direction. Instead, she was twirling a lock of hair around her finger and had her gaze turned towards Jin MinAh.

“Congratulations, Jin MinAh. I’ll give you operational authority. The strategy using numbers that you talked about, I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“Thank you, President!”

Jin MinAh high-fived Sung IkHyun in excitement. As they did so, Ju Hajin roughly left his seat and left the classroom.

At his reaction, the D Class students began exchanging glances between themselves. So HaWon took off her glasses and waved her hand as if dismissing him.

“Just leave him alone. He’ll come around.”

* * *

Ju HaJin made his way back to his dormitory after nearly three hours of working out in the training room.

“She ignores me and gives the authority to Jin MinAh when her student ranking is way lower than mine?” he muttered to himself with a glower, as if still working off his anger.

He didn’t particularly want the authority itself but was mad that the president had chosen Jin MinAh over him.

“So HaWon. I’ll land a good punch on your nose one day...”

Ju HaJin was about to climb the stairs in a huff, but he noticed that a white envelope was in his mailbox.

[B Dorm, Room 102]

It was definitely addressed to him.

“Tch, how old-fashioned...”

He opened the envelope, grumbling all the while.

“N-no way, this is...”

In the envelope was a simple sentence: [If you wanna get stronger, eat this~]; alongside it was a pill.

Ju HaJin looked at the pill and gulped, a nervous expression on his face.

It was a stimulant that boosted a person's skills—ones that hunters on active duty used.

‘Who gave me this?’

Ju HaJin looked around with the question on his mind. The security for entrance into the academy was strict, but the dorms were a space where absolute privacy was maintained.

As Ju HaJin opened up the letter, there was an extra line at the bottom of it—as if the writer had predicted it.

[You want to win against Shin YuSung, right?]

Crunch!

Ju HaJin crumpled up the paper and grimaced.

“Which son of a bitch did this...”

Stimulants were hunting gear that was hard for students to acquire without permission from the Association. Ju HaJin didn't have a single clue as to who the culprit was.

A short, scant three seconds.

Ju HaJin began to think. Stimulants were hard to come by for students.

‘...Come to think of it, it isn't against the rules, right?’

Of course, just because that was the case, it didn't mean that one had to use them. The reason why hunters were wary of using stimulants was because of the possibility of them going [berserk].

If a hunter exhibited power beyond their own scope, they ran the risk

of being consumed by it.

But to Ju HaJin, that sort of strength was urgently needed.

Gulp.

After looking around once more, he shoved the pill into his pocket.

‘Just in case... I’ll keep it for now.’

Ju HaJin walked up the stairs as if nothing had happened.

Chapter 21

[Forest of Spirits]

It was one out of the dozens of dungeons that Academy City managed. Out of them all, it was one that the academy students were the most reluctant to conquer.

“Sumire. Do you know why the students dislike the Forest of Spirits?” asked Shin YuSung with a smile on his face.

Sumire shook her head, mouth firmly shut.

“It’s because undead-type monsters appear here,” Shin YuSung smoothly continued.

“U-undead?!”

Sumire curled up into herself and began looking around the Forest of Spirits. Her arm that held onto Shin YuSung’s sleeve was trembling.

‘...So even a necromancer can be afraid of the undead,’ he thought, looking at the girl.

The reason why students didn’t like undead monsters was simple. The ones who were not active hunters generally used low-grade weapons that were not imbued with the Tower’s magic.

Because of this, it was hard for them to deliver fatal blows to the undead monsters that had resistance to physical damage.

Several times more effort was needed to defeat an undead monster of a similar rank to a regular monster. If one didn’t have specific Traits like Kim EunAh or Adela, it would take too much time to defeat any of them.

Shin YuSung, a hunter who used martial arts, had bad compatibility with the undead monsters. But he had found a way to conquer the dungeon, [Graveyard of Despair], through Sumire.

If he wanted to win the Black Dragon's Hide from the competition that the Hunter Association was hosting, it was necessary for him to confirm Sumire's abilities.

"Uuu... I—This is the first time I've gone to an actual dungeon. So my s-skill might fail..."

The air was rancid and the ground was moist, causing the dirt to sink under every step they took.

Terrified, Sumire stuck close to Shin YuSung and walked throughout the forest.

'...She isn't going to rip my clothes again, right?'

While Shin YuSung was thinking dubious thoughts about Sumire, a blue light swayed somewhere in the forest.

Click. Squish. Squish. Click.

The footsteps of something stepping on rocks and dirt could be heard.

"Huh, huhh?"

Sumire pointed into the depths of the forest, eyes several times wider than usual.

"A h-horse! It's a skeleton horse!"

To be exact, it was a skeletal horse.

It was a monster born from a cursed horse that had been revived as a skeleton. The blue light that had been seen was from the skeletal horse's eyes.

The monster looked at Sumire and shook its head. A bone-chilling sound rang throughout the forest.

Clackclackclack—

Bone rattled against bone.

Because it was a rank 3 monster, if Sumire didn't have Shin YuSung's hair, she had no chance of defeating it with her skills.

‘Thankfully, there isn’t a death knight riding it.’

If there was a death knight—or even the rank 4 boss Dullahan—riding the skeletal horse, Shin YuSung had been planning on stopping his training with Sumire and fighting it with his full might, but the opponent was a single skeletal horse.

“Sumire. You’re going to try and tame that skeletal horse.”

Tup!

Shin YuSung kicked off the ground and ran into the body of the horse.

Crash!

Even though it was a simple tackle, the skeletal horse swayed under the boy's strength. Shin YuSung did not miss this opportunity.

Boom!

He crouched down and kicked the front legs of the monster. The skeletal horse fell down and began to flail around.

Shin YuSung easily suppressed the monster by holding it by its neck bones.

“Okay, it’s your turn.”

Every time the skeletal horse began to struggle, Shin YuSung

tightened his grip on the neck. An unusual resolve began to well up in Sumire at the sight of the monster.

‘...I-I have to become more comfortable as soon as possible.’

Click! Clack!

Sumire hurriedly approached the skeletal horse as the savage sounds of bones rattling against each other began emanating from the monster.

“Snarl!”

The skeletal horse gnashed its teeth to scare Sumire, but she was not cowed.

“...It hurts, huh?”

Sumire stretched out a hand towards its head. She was close enough to be in danger of getting hurt by the skeletal horse if it attacked, but the monster did not bite her.

“...I’m sorry. We weren’t trying to hurt you.”

Sumire gently pet the head of the skeletal horse. Even though this was the first time that she had used her Trait after arriving in Korea, a purple glow emanated from her hand as if she was familiar with using it.

Traits and Skills.

Both were powers that hunters were born with.

One could use them without having to figure out how.

Shine!

As Sumire petted the horse with the hand emitting purple light, the monster swiveled its glowing blue eyes towards her as if it could

understand what she was saying.

“It’s alright. G-good boy?”

Sumire gave a faint smile towards the skeletal horse. Shin YuSung, seeing the docile actions of the monster, loosened his grip on its neck.

As he did so, the skeletal horse stood up and bowed its head towards Sumire, as if showing her its subservience towards her.

“R-really? You want me to ride on top of you?”

Sumire was able to communicate with the skeletal horse, perhaps through her Skill. She sat atop the monster with some hesitation. The horse stood still, as if waiting for her orders.

It had completely acknowledged Sumire as its master. Shin YuSung, watching all of this, nodded.

‘As expected... ’

As he thought, Sumire was the hidden ace needed to easily conquer the [Graveyard of Despair].

Sumire, still on the horse, glanced at Shin YuSung—who was deep in thought—before carefully opening her mouth.

“Umm... Shin YuSung-ssi, would you like to ride it as well?”

* * *

The top floor of the Hunter Association building.

Kang YuChan laughed heartily as he looked out of the window of the office.

“So the competition is tomorrow. Huh huh.”

These students were nothing but newly-formed sprouts to someone

like the Association president, but he knew very well that the students currently developing were the next generation of hunters that had to conquer dungeons, climb the Tower, and stop villains.

“Too bad, I wanted to watch over the competition myself, but I’m too busy these days. There are a lot of... outstanding students among the first-years this year.”

The smiling Kang YuChan changed his expression, narrowing his eyes into slits.

“Let’s make sure that we keep accidents to a minimum. Especially for the foreign students.”

The biggest issue relating to the Dungeon Raid Competition was the fact that there was the risk of casualties happening from it.

Death was a familiar concept to hunters.

The Association was not liable for any casualties among the participants, but the ones who were competing were the elite among the elites from each country. If someone among those MVPs were to die, it held the danger of becoming a diplomatic incident at the worst.

“We will supervise them with the utmost responsibility.” Mei Lin placed her hands on top of her briefcase and replied to him.

Ju HimChan*, an active hunter also in charge of the proceedings, lit the fire on his passion.

“These students are the future of the hunter world! We will make sure the Competition goes off without a hitch so that there is no blemish on the Association’s reputation!”

Looking at the two, Kang YuChan gave a pleased smile.

* * *

Choten Academy, called the greatest academy in Japan, was located in Tochigi prefecture in the Kanto region—it took up an incredibly large

plot of land on a wide-open plain.

Fist King Yu WonHak.

Korea's Hunter Association president, Kang YuChan.

To catch up to Korea, who was leading the raid against the Tower, Japan poured a lot of resources into the development of hunters. As proof, Choten Academy's facilities were top-notch.

The various clubs using this plot of land as their "clubrooms" were the pride and joy of Choten Academy.

But, even among those numerous clubs, if one asked the students which club was the most famous one, everyone's response would be the same.

The hunter club.

It was unique in that it called itself a hunter club, despite every student at Choten being a hunter.

Its members boasted enough skill to warrant it. As proof, the students who were in the hunter club were made up of the three strongest first years in Japan.

The student who was the president of the best-of-the-best hunter club was Kuroki Seiji.

"Tomorrow, we're finally leaving for Korea." He said with a low tone of voice.

Seiji had won many awards in various raid competitions up until now, but nothing had ignited his passion like this.

The reason why Seiji was so excited was none other than the location where the competition was being held.

'...South Korea.'

After the Outbreak released monsters into the world, a large number of dungeons and gates opened in Korea. A depressing amount of them had cropped up, when compared to the population and size of the country.

Many nations expected Korea to fall, but Korea had turned this moment of crisis into opportunity.

One aspect that they were lucky in was that Korea had a lot of hunters who had awakened S-rank Traits when compared to the population.

Second, they systematically divided the conquering of dungeons by difficulty, gave ranks to hunters based on their achievements, and used this system to manage the hunters while reducing the number of casualties to a minimum.

Third, the nation stepped down and gave full support towards the hunters and corporations sponsored strong hunters—much like how they supported sports teams.

Fourth, the numerous dungeons, the systemization of hunters, and the support of the nation and corporations. Because all of these conditions were met, the hunters called the greatest generation were born.

These conditions fed into each other.

Eventually, Korea managed to reach the halfway point of the Tower before any nation in East Asia.

‘...I’ll have to observe their skills, if only to prepare for the international competition.’

Seiji opened his eyes.

As his long eyelashes parted, a glowing white light started to emit from his eyes. A dangerous atmosphere began to form in the grasslands.

“Roaaaarr!”

“Screeech!”

“Hissssss!”

A tiger with red fur.

A large bird with a beak made out of steel.

A 5-meter long, venomous snake.

Seiji talked to his two other teammates in a quiet voice.

“Start.”

Sakura, an archer, raised her bow at Seiji’s command. A pleasant breeze blew her cherry blossom-colored hair behind her.

Woosh! Shnk!

Faster than the speed of light, Sakura’s arrow pierced through the snake’s head—it was the power of her Trait.

“Roaaaaarr!”

As the red tiger began to charge at an incredible speed, the swordsman Kirishima Isshin placed a hand on the sheath of his weapon.

When the tiger was a hair’s breadth away and started to open its jaws, Isshin drew his blade.

Snk!

A perfect unsheathing.

Tear!

As Isshin’s sword drew an arc, the body of the red tiger split in half.

The bird, even with its low intelligence, looked at the members of the hunter club and tilted its head as if it had realized that it was at a disadvantage.

“Screeech!”

The steel-beaked monster cried out and began to flee. Seiji, the leader, did not move. Instead, three shadows erupted from his body.

The shadows, which were the same size as Seiji, were all moving differently and were swinging swords or throwing shuriken.

It only took three seconds for these shadows to find and hunt down the bird.

Seiji turned his back towards the defeated monsters and began to shout at his club members.

“We’re going to Korea!”

A deep passion was burning in his eyes.



##TL/N: unrelated but it's fun that seiji has shadow powers despite being the hot-blooded stereotype

* HimChan is also how the adjective ‘strong’ is pronounced in Korean.

Chapter 22

The headmaster's office at Gaon Academy.

Jin ByungCheol put on his business smile while serving the tea that he saved for his most valued guests.

“Um, ha, haha... w-what are you saying? You'll be participating with Miss S-Sumire?”

“Yes,” replied Shin YuSung calmly.

The headmaster began to lament.

“No, really, that Sumire? The student that I know about?”

“Sumire is a Seven. Isn't she plenty qualified?”

Everyone in the Academy knew that the reason Sumire became one of the Sevens was due to the efforts of Shin YuSung.

It was obvious once one looked at Sumire's student ranking before becoming Shin YuSung's partner. It was why Jin ByungCheol carefully tried to convince him not to pair up her in a way so as to not put Shin YuSung in a bad mood.

“But still... Miss Sumire has an F-rank Trait, no? Wouldn't it be better to pair up with someone from S Class...”

But Shin YuSung was unmoved.

“Headmaster, I am also F-rank. A hunter does not start and end with their Trait.”

“Erm, of course! You are absolutely correct! But even so... those

participating will be representing the Academy...”

Jin ByungCheol was frustrated. If he managed to actually piss off Shin YuSung—which could possibly make the boy want to transfer to a different school—it would be a great loss to Gaon Academy.

But he also could not accept the idea of sending Sumire to the Association competition, thereby ruining the reputation of the Academy.

Shin YuSung stared at his cooling mug of tea, then began to talk in a composed manner.

“F-rank Traits are considered the weakest. Even so, my master believed in my talent and gave me a chance.”

The Fist King had visited the orphanage and discovered Shin YuSung’s constitution. Even though his Trait was F-rank, his talent was like an unpolished gem. If the Fist King had not believed in Shin YuSung’s potential, the Shin YuSung of today would have never existed.

He would have spent the rest of his life as a child thrown away by his own family.

The same could be said of Sumire.

Sumire’s potential was limitless in the [Graveyard of Despair], where many undead monsters resided, but Jin ByungCheol did not believe in Sumire’s ability—he did not even give her a chance.

That was why Shin YuSung could not agree with Jin ByungCheol’s advice. He tried to convince the man with his usual calm tone and honest eyes.

“So Sumire must be given a chance as well.”

Just like his master had given Shin YuSung a chance, it was time for him to give Sumire a chance as well.

“Hm...”

Murmuring to himself, Jin ByungCheol slowly nodded in lieu of a response.

* * *

The luxurious Sevens dormitories.

Sumire, who had finished her training with Shin YuSung in the Forest of Spirits and returned to the dorms, was again taken with its facilities.

“Wow...”

Shhh!

‘Hot water!’

Hot water poured from the showerhead.

The bathtub was filled with aromatic bath products.

On top of that, there was a large TV mounted on the opposite wall.

‘...There’s even a TV in the bathroom!’

Stroke. Stroke.



Sumire touched the remote with a deeply moved expression in her eyes. When she had lived in Japan, she always gave up the small TV they had to the others. For someone with a weak personality like Sumire, she had very few days when she had control of the remote.

But everything in her dorm had been prepared for Sumire and only Sumire.

Beep!

When Sumire—in the drawn bath—turned on the TV with the remote, a large variety of news began to play.

A familiar face appeared in the news.

It was reporter Yu HanNah, who had interviewed Sumire at the Academy.

[In preparation for the competition being held tomorrow, the Academy City branch of the Association has employed 10 of its hunters as safety personnel!]

Yu HanNah pointed her mic towards the Academy City branch manager Mei Lin.

[Is there a reason why you have employed so many people?], she asked.

Mei Lin calmly began to reply.

[It is because the safety of the students is paramount to the Association. This sort of treatment is a given.]

Sumire was touched by the words Mei Lin was saying on TV, but reality was much more complicated than that.

The foreigners participating in the competition in South Korea were elites who were representing their nations.

The Association simply did not want to deal with any accidents happening, as it would be a headache and a half.

This was a nationwide broadcast.

For whoever may be listening, Mei Lin looked at the camera and continued to speak.

[...And the Hunter Association has prepared artifacts befitting Korea's status as the greatest hunter nation for the competition. Please look forward to the prizes.]

Beep!

Artifacts.

The greatest treasure one could obtain, that one only had a small chance to get when conquering the Tower.

'I-I'm going to be in a competition that has such incredible rewards?'

Sumire gulped and walked out of the bathroom. The air flowing out of the heater was warm and drying, and the sleep gown wrapped around her body was of the highest quality.

Everything happening to her felt like a dream.

After transferring there from Japan, Sumire's grades were always at the bottom of the rankings. But the current Sumire was one of the Sevens. She attributed her success to Shin YuSung.

'He even gave me his hairs, and... '

Shin YuSung had comforted Sumire when she had been nervous about being a burden to him.

[Don't worry, you did your best.]

The result was, of course, first place among the lower-rank classes.

Shin YuSung displayed his incredible prowess and completely cleaned out the points on Jewel Island. He had also defeated the rank 4 boss golem. It was a given.

Sumire wasn't used to goodwill being directed towards her, and Shin YuSung had told her that this competition was important. He had also told her that her Trait would be crucial to them conquering the dungeon. Shin YuSung was the first person who had ever put so much confidence in Sumire.

“...I want to repay it.”

Sumire, who was staring at the ceiling, muttered this out loud without thinking.

Shut.

Sumire closed her mouth and looked at her hands. Even though she was an F-rank, if she used her [Call of the Undead] Skill well to tame the monster, she could help Shin YuSung.

‘I have to... do this!’

Lying on her bed, Sumire slowly fell into slumber while vowing this to herself.

* * *

The day of the competition.

As the 30 selected parties arrived at the location, the Hunter Association's organizers began to guide them in an orderly manner.

“Participants, please follow all instructions given by the organizers!”

“All parties from outside Korea must complete their procedure here!”

Participants from famous academies from each city were a given, but if one also added the participants coming from the international academies, almost 100 people were gathered at the Association.

But even among such a numerous group, there was only a single party with one member in it.

First place of Gaon Academy.

Adela Ortensia.

She was one out of the two seeded participants from Gaon, but she had decided not to make a party with any other students.

Because of this, Adela stood out from the group of contestants and managed to catch Yu HanNah's eye.

‘Oh? That’s...?’

Yu HanNah, who was looking for an interview subject, began to approach Adela with a shine in her eyes.

“Gaon’s first in the student rankings! Miss Adela, right? I’m from K Channel. Do you mind doing a short interview with me?”

Adela did not reply to Yu HanNah’s question; she instead looked in a different direction with a blank expression on her face.

‘So is that a yes or a no?’

Yu HanNah wasn’t a fan of people with personalities like Adela, but she put aside her distaste for the sake of the interview.

“It seems like you’re the only one who decided to participate in the competition alone. Is there a particular reason?” she asked. “Maybe to keep an artifact all to yourself? If not, maybe...”

“...Because I’m fine on my own,” Adela replied curtly to Yu HanNah’s endless stream of questions.

The dungeon raid competition was something that most academies were deathly afraid of. But Adela didn’t even need to prepare for it.

‘Astella Ice Castle’.

Adela stared at the currently inactive portal. It was a dungeon where

the boss was an ice witch who would freeze an enemy to the bone.

The boss was estimated to be rank 4 or 5.

No one but first place of Gaon Academy's student rankings, that being Adela, could think to conquer the dungeon all by themselves.

Yu HanNah laughed at Adela's pensive expression.

"Fine on your own, huh. As expected of first place! Do you have a student that you consider your rival, then?"

Adela mulled over the question. The term 'rival' was incredibly unfamiliar to her as someone who had never lost a fight.

But there was someone who kept nagging at her mind—the disciple of the Fist King, who had defeated her grandfather. The boy who had won against Park SuHyun and had become a Seven, despite having an F-rank Trait.

"...Shin YuSung."

Yu HanNah smirked at the answer Adela blurted out without thinking.

* * *

China's representative was chosen as the dark horse of the event despite the venue being in South Korea.

Liú Jùn.

The contestants' gazes turned towards Liú Jùn when he entered as if drawn to him. It was a given, considering that Liú Jùn was the disciple of the famous Sword God and that he was a well-known hunter not just in his homeland China but also around the world.

But Liú Jùn himself did not care about the looks people were giving him—he was staring at his silent phone while deep in thought.

Han SeolAh began to jab at Liú Jùn in fluent Korean.

“Wow, you’re still concerned about your sister when you’re all the way out here?”

Liú Jùn didn’t fall for Han SeolAh’s taunts. He considered her nothing more than a noisy woman.

Han SeolAh kept talking at her own pace without paying mind to Liú Jùn’s reactions.

“Ha~ if I were you, I’d be coasting on this fame. Maybe get myself on TV while I have the chance.”

Liú Jùn still made no acknowledgment of her.

Han SeolAh clicked her tongue in disappointment. A handsome face didn’t enhance a hunter’s capabilities in combat, but it did raise one’s popularity with the citizens. And hunters with lots of prominence, of course, received more opportunities.

“Tch, this is what you’re supposed to use your looks for. What a waste. A waste. Um... wait, who’s that?”

Han SeolAh stopped her rambling to stare at something, interest piqued.

“Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi! There are only ten minutes left! Oh, it’s nine minutes now...”

“There’s no need to be nervous.”

The source of the voices was Sumire, who was shaking with apprehension, and Shin YuSung, who had a calm expression on his face. Han SeolAh looked at the two before beginning to talk to Liú Jùn again.

“Ooh, the Fist King’s disciple. It’s him, right? His name is... ugh, I forgot.”

Liú Jùn finally showed some sort of reaction.

He was interested by the fact that the notoriously picky Fist King had chosen someone with an F-rank Trait to be his disciple.

Liú Jùn took a look at the name of the portal that Shin YuSung was getting ready to enter.

[Graveyard of Despair]

It was a difficult dungeon for a martial artist to challenge, as the undead monsters had resistance to physical attacks. Han SeolAh looked at Shin YuSung with a puzzled expression.

“Did he choose the wrong dungeon? Why would someone who fights with his bare fists go and try to defeat the undead?”

The four parties to clear a dungeon the quickest were the ones who were going to receive the artifact prizes. Even when this was the case, Shin YuSung had chosen the dungeon most disadvantageous to himself.

Vmmm!

The portals activated as the competition began. Shin YuSung and Sumire disappeared into the blue, glowing portal.

Shhnk.

Liú Jùn pulled out his sword and spoke to Han SeolAh for the first time.

“Don’t slack off.”

Liú Jùn wanted first place and nothing less.

A teammate who did not meet his standards was nothing more than an obstacle for him.

Chapter 23

Their surroundings changed as soon as the two entered the portal. Shin YuSung calmly scanned the environment.

‘No monsters in this area.’

A black fog obscured their field of view. The red moon in the sky seemed to exist as a part of the dungeon. Graves were scattered over the landscape, peeking out of the ground. The gloomy atmosphere made Sumire subconsciously grab onto Shin YuSung’s sleeve.

“Uuu... W-where do you think the boss is?”

Beep!

Almost as if answering her question, the Pocket on her wrist began to display a hologram.

[You have entered the dungeon.]

[Name—Graveyard of Despair]

[Details—Undead monsters haunt this location. The Knight of Death and the Immortal are locked into a never-ending fight in a bid for power.]

The Pocket stored items, of course, but it also displayed information about dungeons with a hologram—so long as it was one that had been recorded by the Association.

“The Knight of Death and the Immortal...”

Sumire muttered the titles of the bosses. Then, Shin YuSung opened his mouth to speak.

“The rules of this competition say that you just need to defeat one boss. It’s fine to go back after doing so.”

It was an obvious rule to implement, considering that the more bosses a dungeon had, the worse one’s record in the competition would be if they had to defeat all of them. The dungeons that the Association had prepared for the competition each had their own numbers of bosses, but they were surprisingly well balanced with each other.

The more bosses there were in a dungeon, the higher likelihood someone had of meeting one. Fewer bosses meant that there were fewer factors, resulting in a safer and more predictable dungeon.

But Shin YuSung was not satisfied with just that.

‘One boss isn’t enough.’

It was a rare opportunity for a student to face off against a rank 4 boss monster. There was a small chance of an artifact dropping after defeating a boss, and there were a lot of cases where someone managed to get a Skill after facing off against one and improving their proficiency with their Trait. Because of this, a boss was nothing but a stepping stone on Shin YuSung’s goal to get stronger.

‘...I’ll defeat both bosses.’

Of course, that was easier said than done.

Their clear record had to be in the top four for Shin YuSung to receive the Black Dragon’s Hide from the Association as a prize. Thus, Shin YuSung was thinking of doing twice the work of the others while also reaching that ranking.

“Sumire. Get ready,” Shin YuSung stated, looking into the shadowed depths of the forest.

“Okay!”

Sumire took a stance with a nervous expression on her face.

Clop. Clop.

The crude sound of hooves hitting the ground rang out from the forest. Even though the graveyard was bathed in the red glow of the moon, not a single thing could be seen of the inside of the forest.

Clop. Clop.

The sound of hooves began to get closer. A skeletal horse emerged from the forest, blue lights swaying in place of its eyes.

“Th-that’s...”

Sumire pointed at the skeletal horse—to be more exact, above it. A knight wearing armor was riding atop it.

“A death knight!” she yelled, surprised.

The skeletal horse shook its head once and began to charge at Sumire.

“D... ie.”

The strange voice of the death knight.

A bone-chilling sound emanated from its head, which was nothing but a skull.

The skeletal horse ran at an incredible speed across the stone floor. Shin YuSung stood facing the death knight, waiting for an opportunity.

“D... ie!”

The death knight swung its sword, momentum gathered in its blade.

The force of the blade, containing the power of the skeletal horse’s charge, was almost like a Skill in and of itself.

‘It’s slow.’

Shin YuSung twisted his body to the side to dodge the blade. Even the horse, charging at incredible speeds, seemed slow to him when he was concentrating.

‘There.’

Shin YuSung reached into a gap in the armor with his hand, grabbed the bones, and threw the knight onto the ground.

It was a reckless action to perform, considering the speed at which the skeletal horse was running. But Shin YuSung, who had been trained by the Fist King, had managed to actually do it.

Bam!

The death knight was sprawled onto the ground, and the skeletal knight had lost its owner. Shin YuSung could have crushed the monster’s bones but refrained from doing so.

“Sumire.”

“Got it!”

The undead were precious manpower so long as Sumire was at his side.

Flash!

[Call forth the Undead]

A purple light shone from Sumire’s hand. The death knight stopped moving, as if answering her call.

It was uncertain whose voice came from Sumire’s death knight, but it seemed like it was in a fairly high position among the undead.

“I will now serve you.”

The death knight got down on one knee.

Even the skeletal horse bowed its neck. Sumire watched all of this happen with a shocked expression.

“Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi! I did it!” she belatedly shouted with childlike glee.

The fact that her Skill worked against a death knight meant that, despite her Trait being F-rank, her proficiency with it was high; it also meant that she had a large pool of mana.

Shin YuSung smiled at Sumire’s happy expression.

“Sumire. Ask it where the Dullahan is.”

“Right, right, right! Um, death knight-nim. Can you tell me where the Dullahan might be...”

The Dullahan.

A headless death knight with the strongest swordsmanship among its kind, it was one of the boss monsters residing in the graveyard.

But the boss of the death knight was not currently the Dullahan, but Sumire.

“...The Dullahan will soon appear from the mist forest.”

As the monster replied with the location of the boss, Shin YuSung began to relay the plan that had been created in advance to his partner.

“Sumire. Follow the plan.”

“Okay!”

Nodding, she took out a strand of Shin YuSung’s hair that she had carefully stored in her Pocket.

Sumire and Shin YuSung.

Their dungeon raid was going smoothly.

* * *

The branch manager of the Academy City branch of the Hunter Association, Mei Lin, carefully monitored the Graveyard of Despair with a drone camera.

She was quite a busy person, but she thought that the student that both Kang YuChan and the Fist King were keeping an eye on warranted at least this much of her time.

“...But they split up the party when there are only two people in it?”

Shin YuSung headed off in one direction, and Sumire built her troops through the skeleton that she had summoned with Shin YuSung’s hair and the death knight. They had decided to act separately when both bosses were strong enough that even their powers combined might not be enough to beat them.

This was behavior that she could at least understand from someone like Adela, who had chosen to be a one-man group, but Mei Lin had no idea why Shin YuSung and Sumire had decided to split up.

“Ah! Don’t tell me?”

Mei Lin called out to Ju HimChan, who was monitoring the Chinese team next to her.

“Excuse me, do you know how many bosses are in the Graveyard of Despair?”

Ju HimChan energetically replied to her question.

“Of course I do! The Graveyard has two! The Astella Ice Castle has one! And...”

“Stop. That’s enough, thank you. You said there were two, right?”

Mei Lin cut Ju HimChan off and went back to watching the monitor. This was something that no other student had succeeded in doing before.

‘So they definitely are... ’

Mei Lin had figured out what Shin YuSung was thinking.

‘...But will it be possible? The teams participating this time are... ’

Mei Lin shifted her gaze to the other monitors, a serious expression on her face. Her eyes landed on the monitor showing the exploits of the team from China.

* * *

[The Moonlit Holy Land]

It was a beautiful dungeon where moonlight shone onto the green prairie, even during the day.

Han SeolAh, a Korean who was a member of the Chinese team, threw a spear, she smirked.

“This is the 98th.”

Shunk!

The spear stabbed itself into the body of the moonlight wolf, a species whose fur reflected its namesake. The grass was dyed red in the blood of these wolves.

Vween!

Mana gathered in Han SeolAh’s hand and formed into the shape of a bow and arrow. It was the power of her Trait, [Weapon Materialization].

Whoosh! Snk!

“99.”

Han SeolAh managed to pierce through the moonlight wolf’s body again with the arrow. The last one was left to Liú Jùn.

Slash!

A perfect strike, one that could barely be followed with human eyes.

The body of the moonlight wolf split in half in front of Liú Jùn. Han SeolAh looked up at the moon in the sky.

“This is the 100th one. The guardian of the Holy Land will finally...”

The moon shining down on the prairie suddenly became covered by something. Like an eclipse, the moon lighting up the dungeon had disappeared. Han SeolAh continued to talk while looking at the darkening sky without a single hint of fear.

“The boss isn’t appearing. It’s just getting dark! Was the info from the Pocket wr—”

Shhk!

Han SeulAh heard a terrifying sound next to her ear. It was the sound of something sharp cutting through the air.

“Huh!?”

Surprised, she threw her body backward. But it was too late.

Slice!

The sharp claws of the beast tore into Han SeolAh’s arm, reducing it to a ragged mess.

“Argh! Kh...”

Only then did Han SeolAh back up, putting distance between her and

the monster.

“Grrr, growl...”

Harsh breathing could be heard in front of her.

As light slowly shone back again on the land, the identity of the beast was revealed.

A werewolf.

A monster that looked like the combination of man and wolf. Han SeolAh gritted her teeth and gripped her bleeding arm.

“Ugh, m-my arm...”

Wounded on the arm she used for combat, Han SeolAh was more or less taken out of the fight.

Liú Jùn coldly looked down at Han SeolAh.

“...Move aside.”

Han SeolAh flinched at Liú Jùn’s frigid tone. He did not forgive anyone who got in his way—not even his teammates.

Han SeolAh shut her mouth and stepped back. As she did so, Liú Jùn faced the werewolf with his sword at the ready.

A monster with the freedom of movement of a human and the physical capabilities of an animal.

“Grrr... Roar!”

The drooling werewolf ran towards Liú Jùn. The boy’s body disappeared in an instant.

Slice!

The arms...

Slice!

The back...

Slice!

The legs...

A split-second.

The werewolf's body was shredded under Liú Jùn's sword. It was the power of the Trait, [Acceleration], said to be the best even among its fellow S-rank Traits. On top of that, he was a monster who had inherited the techniques of the Sword God.

Liú Jùn cut the werewolf into pieces in a show of the overwhelming gap in their skill.

The fur of the werewolf was one that hardened to be as tough as steel under the moonlight of the Holy Land, but all of that was meaningless.

Liú Jùn's own speed was several times faster than the werewolf's.

‘He really is a monster...’

This was what Han SeolAh thought while looking at Liú Jùn.

She found it hard to believe that there would be anyone who would be a match for Liú Jùn, even if one scoured through every academy on the planet.

“Grr, grrrr...”

The werewolf, arm cut off and blood flowing freely from it, took in a deep breath. Liú Jùn stared at the werewolf with emotionless eyes.

Snk!

Liú Jùn swung his sword, imbued with mana. The werewolf's head fell onto the ground, and the moonlight shattered.

Vm.

Liú Jùn sheathed his blade and walked towards the portal.

Stomp, stomp. Stop.

He stopped right next to Han SeolAh. He began to speak without even throwing a glance towards her.

“We’re going back.”

Frustrated with her own mistake, Han SeolAh nodded with a miserable expression on her face.

The Sword God of Skyscraper Academy, Liú Jùn.

The Chinese team was first place in the rankings.



Chapter 24

[Fogged Forest]

The area around the Graveyard of Despair was composed entirely of trees. The hunters called the areas with dense fog the ‘Fogged Forest’.

‘...The Dullahan must be skulking around this area.’

The Dullahan was a hard boss monster to find, as it did not stay in one place and instead roamed around the forest.

On top of that, it was an undead monster—the worst kind of opponent for a martial artist like Shin YuSung.

‘The worst boss I could have challenged if I wanted to set a record.’

But Shin YuSung had no choice. If he wanted to get the Black Dragon’s Hide, the clothes that the Fist King used during his youth, as his reward, he had to clear the Graveyard of Despair.

The one thing in his favor was that when the boss monster Dullahan was roaming the forest, other death knights would not appear in it.

‘...And no other living things live in the Fogged Forest.’

Only the Dullahan and Shin YuSung were in the Fogged Forest.

‘So I can find it.’

Shin YuSung placed his hands on the ground. Even if the skeletal horse that the Dullahan was riding was gigantic, it was impossible for one to sense where they would be by feeling the vibrations of its hooves on the forest floor.

But Shin YuSung defied impossibility.

He focused his mana towards the tips of his hands to search for the Dullahan. He wasn't using [Heightened Focus] this time, despite having grown a habit from his training to subconsciously use it.

‘I need to extend my senses... ’

The breath of the forest...

The wind tickling his hand...

He also felt the pulse of the land.

Clop— clop! Clop—

He could feel the vibrations of something large hitting the soft soil and hard rocks on the ground.

Shin YuSung looked towards that something and smiled.

‘Found you.’

* * *

Adela walked towards a beautifully sculpted and unmarred ice castle with an expressionless face.

The path she was taking was lined with rock-solid ice statues of what used to be monsters.

[Astella Ice Castle]

The dungeon that Academy City was most reluctant to manage. The monsters that appeared were, of course, around the same difficulty as those in the other dungeons. The problem was with the location that the boss monster was living in.

Boom— Creak!

As Adela pushed the ice doors with her fingertips, the inside of the castle was revealed. An endlessly spiralling staircase that extended to the ceiling complete with countless traps extended before her.

The wide-open ceiling was lined with archers formed of ice circled around the hole and pointing their bows at Adela.

This dungeon was practically a fortress.

Adela slowly shifted her gaze between the stairs and the archers. Her eyes held no emotion. Her stare seemed even colder than the boss monster, a witch made entirely of ice.

‘So it’s stairs.’

Adela crouched. She did not head towards the path that the dungeon had made for her but instead began to concentrate and allocated mana to her legs.

Wssh!

As the arrows loosed by the ice archers began to fly towards Adela, she leapt off of the ground.

Tap!

Adela reached about halfway up to the ceiling with one jump. Even so, her physical abilities were around the same as a regular person; she had never trained her body.

What she had just done was done entirely with the power of her mana.

Thuck-thuckthuck!

The arrows flew into the ground. Underneath Adela, who was still in mid-air, a platform made of ice appeared.

Tap.

Adela casually landed on the platform. Even though the floor was a dizzying height away from her, she stepped on empty air without hesitation.

Tap. Step.

Stairs made of ice formed where Adela slowly walked. To the ice witch, Adela was, up until then, an opponent she had never met before.

“Kill her! Send her back down!”

White eyelashes. A body made of ice.

As the sharp voice of the ice witch rang throughout the castle, the ice archers, in unison, shot their arrows.

Wsssh!

The ice arrows raining down on her could not stop Adela from advancing.

Crack! Crrrrrack!

The intense chill in the air around her even managed to freeze ice. The swift arrows turned into ice as dense as a rock.

And those arrows fell through the dizzying heights to the ground below.

“Fall!” yelled the witch.

Adela turned off the translator function of her Pocket, as if annoyed by her speaking.

“■■■■!”

Ice rained from the ceiling.

Adela did not gain a single scratch from the torrent of ice showering her.

Woosh—

Arriving at the top, Adela waved her hand like the conductor of an orchestra. The mana emitting from her hand glowed blue and annihilated ten ice archers' heads.

Crack! Split! Shatter!

Seeing the ice archers she made be destroyed in an instant, the ice witch stood up with her own staff in hand.

Even among the rank 4 boss monsters, the ice witch was high-level. On top of that, she could use mana to cast a variety of ice spells.

“■■■■!”

With an incomprehensible speech, spears made of the chill began to form around her.

Tap!

As the witch hit the end of her staff against the floor, the spears flew towards Adela.

Woooooosh!

It was a skill that could be considered her equivalent of a hunter's ultimate attack.

‘As expected, this is also...’ thought Adela, face expressionless.

Nothing was interesting to Adela—not conquering dungeons, nor the spars at the Academy. Because she was so strong, the hunter world that her grandfather had described to her and the experience she was living through were different.

Crack! Crack!

As she stretched out her hand, the spears turned into powder and scattered.

“■■■■!”



The ice witch cried in her incomprehensible language. Even if she couldn't understand her, Adela had an idea of what the witch was feeling. Fear and despair clouded her expression. That expression of defeat was something shared among the opponents Adela fought

against.

In the end, Adela couldn't feel anything that day, either.

“...È troppo facile (too easy)”

Adela spoke with a voice colder than the chill freezing the surrounding area; she lightly clenched the hand that had been stretched out. Blue mana scattered from her pale fingers.

Boom!

As the mana she had gathered spread out from her hand, ice shards swept through the area like a tsunami.

* * *

Vwwwm!

As Aedla returned from the dungeon after clearing it, the reporters at the Association showered her with flashes from their cameras.

Snap! Snap!

“Are you thinking of participating in the International Competition? If you are, are you of South Korean nationality or Italian nationality...”

“You're the first transfer student of Gaon Academy to be first in the student ranking! Do you have a secret to your success?”

“Please give us your thoughts on being second in the Dungeon Raid Competition!”

“What is your opinion on the Chinese team...”

The reporters swarmed towards her like a wave of ants, mics outstretched. Adela didn't answer them and looked at the scoreboard.

[1st — Liú Jùn (Skyscraper Academy)]

[2nd — Adela (Gaon Academy)]

[3rd — Unclaimed]

The names of the leaders of the teams that had passed were written on the electronic display alongside the academy they were attending, but Shin YuSung's name was not up there.

‘It isn’t there... ’

The disciple of the Fist King.

The thought that Shin YuSung was of equal skill had been rapidly growing in her.

Vwwwm!

As the portal next to her activated, Adela smoothly turned her head towards it.

‘...Shin YuSung?’

But the party that came out of the portal was not the one Adela had been thinking of.

—Third place is Seiji from Choten Academy!

The Japanese team's students walked out of the portal as the voice of an organizer rang out.

Kuroki Seiji, with a stiff expression on his face.

Hanasaki Sakura, amiably smiling and waving at the reporters.

Kirishima Isshin, fingering the blade holstered to his waist.

“Please give us your thoughts on being third in...”

The reporters lying in wait also pointed their mics towards the Japanese team, but Seiji was looking at the electronic display.

“...Another loss,” he muttered.

Gaon Academy.

A hunter from Korea was second place, once again. Sakura tried to comfort the self-deprecating Seiji.

“Don’t get too broken up about it. We still beat one of the teams.”

She was talking about Shin YuSung.

He had still not placed in the rankings.

“Is that so,” was Seiji’s cool reply.

Right then, something began to change. The spectators watching the monitors began to whisper amongst each other.

“H-he’s going to defeat the Dullahan and go back to her? Are they trying to do a double raid?”

“Two bosses for the competition? That’s crazy, right? They’ll just fail and not even place in the rankings...”

The attention of the party leaders was drawn to the unbelievable conversation that the spectators were having. Among those, the one who was the most sensitive about it was Liú Jùn.

‘...A double raid?’

The act of aiming for two bosses during the Dungeon Raid Competition was unheard of. This was due to the fact that one could lose their chance to get the artifact prize from the Association if they tried to do an unnecessary challenge like that.

It was the first time that anyone had attempted such a thing since the

beginning of the Association.

A change, unnoticeable to most, appeared in Adela's blank expression as she watched the monitor.

‘...He really is interesting.’

Even his thoughts were different from most people.

Of course, if it stopped at just an attempt, it would all be for nothing. If he wanted to call it a success, he had to place 4th in the rankings. With faint anticipation, Adela watched Shin YuSung teams' monitor.

* * *

Fogged Forest...

Shattered scraps of armor lay in front of Shin YuSung.

‘I really have a bad affinity with undead monsters.’

First of all, the undead did not have any weaknesses on their body. There was no such thing as a fatal blow to them, and in the case of the Dullahan, he had to destroy the core being protected by its armor.

It was an impossible feat for a regular student.

Shin YuSung, with the skills of the Fist King, had accomplished that very feat.

Battle God Style – Savage Dragon's Boulder Crushing Palm

The Dullahan had been reduced into nothing, as if representing proof of the skill's destructive force. The only thing Shin YuSung had to do was defeat the ‘Immortal’ and return to the Association.

As his strides became more urgent, a certain face appeared in Shin YuSung's thoughts.

‘...Sumire should be doing well.’

Next was Sumire’s turn—Shin YuSung’s ace up his sleeve.

Chapter 25

‘S-scary!’

Sumire kept moving forward, even while flinching the entire time. Death knights and skeleton knights holding various weapons followed behind her.

Stompstompstompstomp.

It was a terrifying sight that resembled an army from hell. Of course, the one showing the greatest amount of prowess among them was the skeleton created from Shin YuSung’s hair.

“Clack! Clacklack!”

Whenever Shin YuSung’s skeleton saw another skeleton trying to rebel, it destroyed its armor with one blow. Soon, it managed to catch up to Sumire.

“Th-thank you for your hard work!”

Sumire was polite, even to Shin YuSung’s skeleton. As the army continued to expand, Sumire became even more of a necromancer than before.

The undead battalion began to cover the entirety of the Graveyard of Despair.

“Clack! Clacklack!”

The skeletons rattled their jawbones and glared with their hollow eyes.

As they did so, a death knight at the forefront of the army, riding on top of a skeletal horse, lifted its weapon.

“Our M... aster wants blood! Search for the un... dead!”

Sumire flinched as she heard the cry of the death knight behind her. Her eyes began to spin in place.

“Eek! N-no! I don’t want b-blood...”

After hearing her words, the death knight raised its weapon once more.

“Mast... er’s mind has changed!” it shouted. “Destroy them! Do not leave a single bone fragment of the opponent intact! Create ch... aos! Des... troy, every... thing, in your... sight!”

As its speech concluded, the other skeletons began to rattle their bones, creating a death knell from hell.

Clackclackclackclackclack!

This was their form of a passionate cheer.

“Cl-clack!”

“Clack! Clack clack!”

Sumire lost her words at the sight of hell’s banquet laid out before her.

‘...I-I guess I should just stay quiet.’

While Sumire was in the process of becoming the master of the Graveyard of Despair, the ground suddenly split in half.

Scrape, sccccrape!

Green mist and black clouds spewed out from the crevice. A mysterious hand found purchase on the ground and began to creep out of the crack. What pulled itself out was a creature with a thin, pale body wearing an old, red robe.

“I have... awakened.”

It was the lich, otherwise known as the Immortal. With a face no different from a corpse's, the lich locked eyes with Sumire.

“No fear, I see. To think that a mere mortal would lead the undead and invade the territory of me, Balak...”

Finished with its speech, the lich stretched out its hand.

Sinister energy began to pour from its grasp. As it seeped into the cracks in the ground, a worrying light began emanating from it.

“Meet despair!”

Scccrrape!

From the crevices in the ground, more skeletons began to emerge, wailing into the air. The undead that the lich had summoned numbered close to the undead that Sumire had collected while roaming around the graveyard.

If Sumire's [Call of the Undead] Skill made undead monsters join her side, the lich's skill could be called 'Summoning'.

Considering the amount of mana used, as well as what the effect of the skill was, the lich's skill was definitely of a higher and more difficult level.

As if to prove it, the lich began to summon a giant skeleton golem, something that the current Sumire could never summon.

“...Come out! Skull golem!”

Scccrrape! Rrrumble!

As the skull golem began to crawl out of the crevice in the ground, the undead in its vicinity began to scatter, ignoring who was a friend or foe.

The lich was considered strong, even among the rank 4 boss monsters. The usual Sumire could never hope to fight against it.

Boom!

The skull golem slammed against the ground with its giant hand. Sumire began to scream as she looked at where the golem had punched.

“Groooooaarr!!”

Sumire’s purple hair haphazardly flew behind her from the force of the golem’s cry.

“U-uu... uuu...”

Even one hit from the golem would be fatal. Sumire began to shiver at the thought of the worst-case scenario, as she could die.

Even so, she stretched out a hand towards the golem.

‘I have to help... Shin YuSung-ssi.’

Sumire didn’t really care about the results of the dungeon raid. It wasn’t important to her, someone who had previously had the worst grades in the Academy. But it was different when Shin YuSung was involved.

Shin YuSung was the first person in Gaon Academy who had believed in Sumire.

Sumire didn’t want to betray the boy’s trust in her. She wanted to help him, not be a burden to him.

Sumire’s eyes were filled with fervor as she stared down the skull golem.

‘I can do it! I don’t want to... disappoint Shin YuSung-ssi... ’

Her desire to do her best was both for Shin YuSung,

‘...and I don’t want to be abandoned.’

—and possibly, also for her.

Purple light began to spill out of her outstretched hand.

Shine!

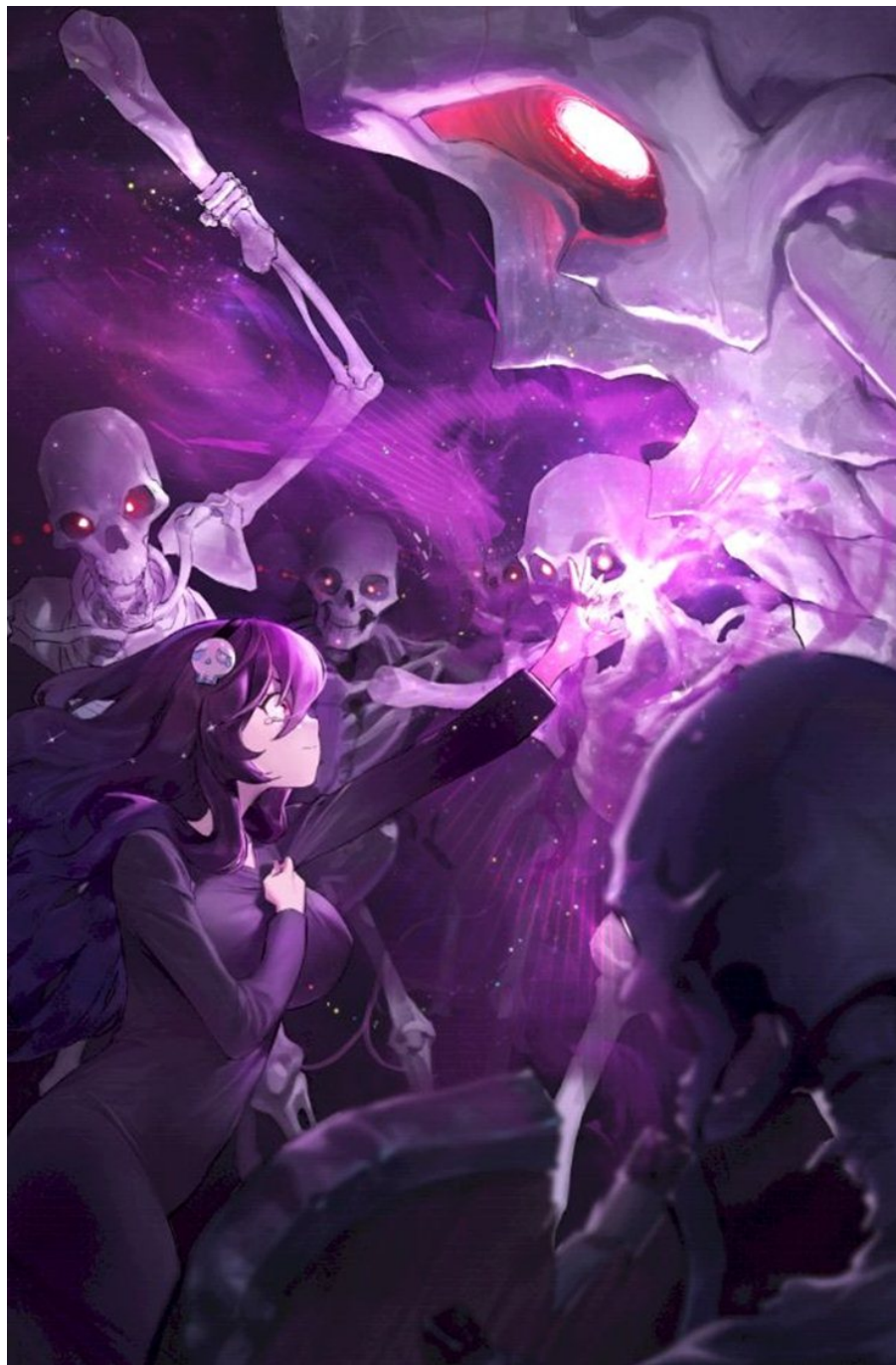
A curtain of purple light began to drape over the sky as if covering the entire world. It was not a skill that Sumire had used yet.

‘Th-this is... ’

— You have obtained the new skill, [Veil of the Undead] .

A hologram appeared in front of a shocked Sumire from the Pocket on her wrist. The curtain that lazily drifted downwards from the heavens blanketed all of the undead, including the skull golem.

Zzzt!



As the curtain, having fallen down onto the ground, disappeared, the skull golem and the other undead turned towards the lich and began to display their aggression towards it.

“Groaaar!”

“Cla-clack!”

Even though the lich had the power to summon the undead, Sumire had the power to control said undead. And unlike the lich, Sumire only had to use up a small amount of mana to accomplish this.

Her powers perfectly counteracted the lich's own.

In the Graveyard of Despair, Sumire could show greater power than that of an S-rank Trait. Shin YuSung's faith in her had come through.

“How can this...”

She couldn't make the boss monster into her subordinate as well, but Sumire's current situation was heavily favored towards her. Gathering her courage, Sumire pointed towards the lich.

“...A-attack!”

The undead reacted fiercely to their master's orders.

“Grooooar!”

“Cl-clack!”

“Follow... master's orders!”

Skull golem. Skeletons. Death knights.

A countless number of the undead attacked the lich. Sumire bit her lip.

‘...Please,’ she desperately prayed.

The lich's robes tore from the death knight's blades, and the lich's mana shield crumbled under the skull golem's blows.

Boom!

On top of that, the skeleton made of Shin YuSung's hair pressured the lich using its unique martial arts.

Pssh!

The undead archers provided support by loosing fire arrows at the opponent. This successful assault was something Sumire could never do if she was only at the Academy.

‘I only have a third of my mana left... but I can do this!’

Sumire watched the battle with hope-filled eyes. Even as her mana kept depleting, her fight against the lich was on the cusp of success.

But Sumire was unlucky.

‘Huh? That ring... ’

The lich was laughing suspiciously. Sumire had belatedly realized that something was wrong.

“I congratulate you. To think that a mortal could corner me like this with necromancy...”

The ring on the lich's gaunt finger began to emanate light. Very rarely, some bosses appeared in dungeons equipped with an artifact.

“Even so... this is the end.”

The lich that had spawned was one of those cases.

Shaaa!

Hundreds of strands spread out from the lich's ring; the black strands pierced through the undead and began to absorb their power.

Skull golem.

Death knights.

Skeletons.

Shin YuSung's skeleton.

The lich managed to absorb every single undead monster in the graveyard.

“...I thank you for the meal.”

The emancipated body of the lich had turned muscular, and it was filled to the brim with power—thanks to its overflowing mana.”

“The Immortal. This is the power of an artifact.”

The lich's voice no longer shook. Only Sumire and the lich were left in the graveyard, but this matchup could not be called equal.

“Uuu...”

Sumire took a step back.

“I screwed up again...”

Plip plip.

Spherical tears dripped down Sumire's cheeks. She tried her best. She could have succeeded, but she managed to ruin it again.

“Sniff... sob.”

Sumire always screwed things up at the most crucial time.

She screwed up during the show-and-tell in kindergarten, the one that she had practiced three weeks for.

She also screwed up when she showed her F-rank Trait to her father,

who had been ecstatic to know that she possessed a Trait.

She had also screwed up during the incident when she had gone to South Korea as if fleeing Japan. They were all the same.

But just this one time, Sumire didn't want to betray Shin YuSung's expectations. At the very least, she wanted to pay him back for the faith he had in her.

But one's greatest efforts and desperate feelings did not always achieve results.

“...This is the end.”

The lich stretched out its left hand towards Sumire; as the pale skin began to wriggle, it turned into the shape of a spear.

Whoosh!

Sumire channeled all of her remaining mana into a shield and surrounded herself with it. Even though her tears made the surroundings blurry, it was obvious to her that the lich's attack would tear through her shield like paper.

Clench.

Sumire shut her eyes.

The silence stretched on as if time had stopped.

The lich's attack had been blocked.

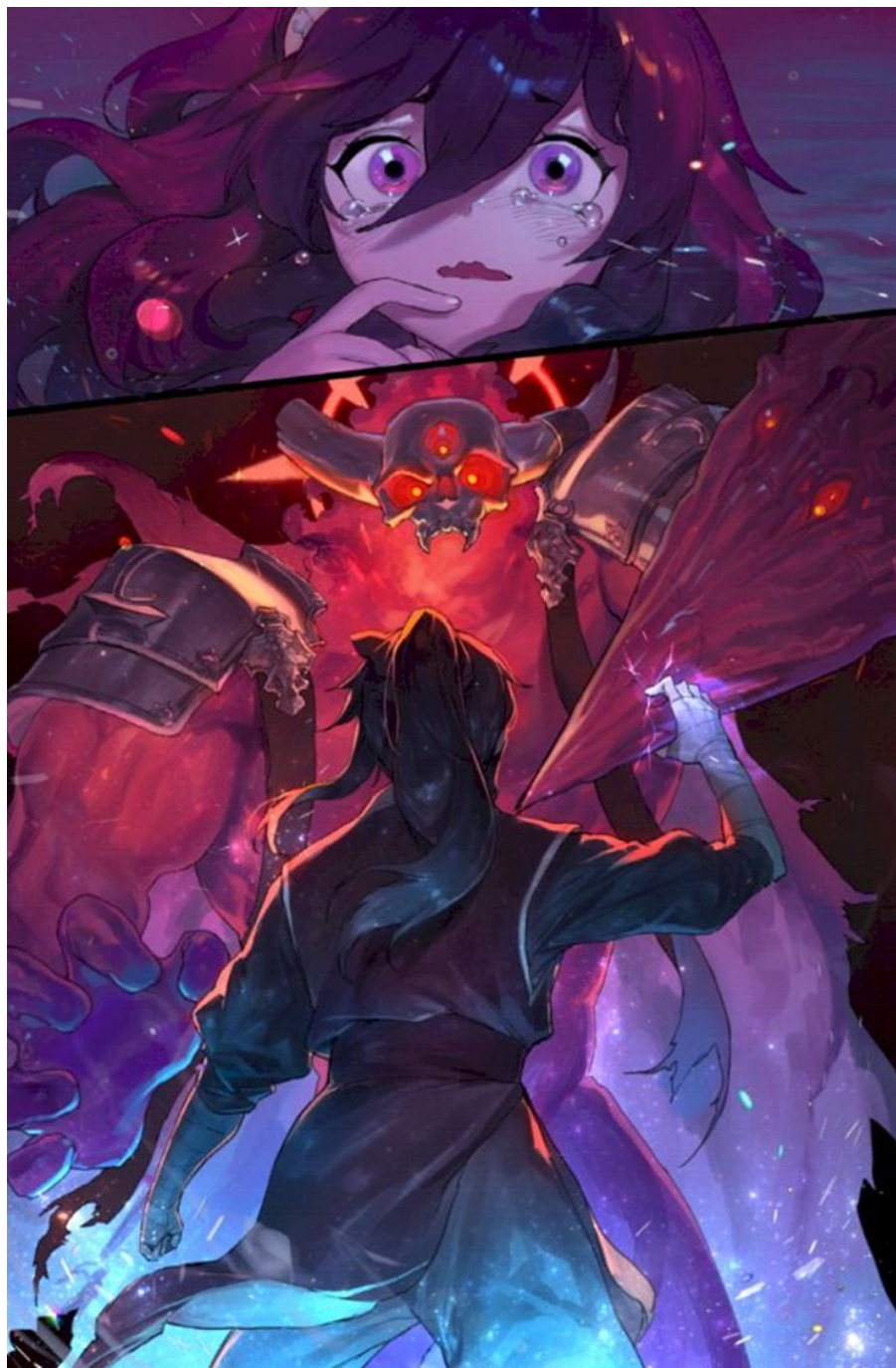
‘...Huh?’

Sumire was not the one who had blocked it.

‘It can't be... ’

Sumire carefully opened her eyes.

What stood in front of her was a familiar back.



TL/N: How freaking gorgeous are these colors??

“...To think that you cornered a boss with an artifact of such power.”

With his gaze still concentrated in front of himself, Shin YuSung calmly praised Sumire.

“...It really is a good thing that I signed you up for this raid.”

It could be considered almost a dry sort of praise.

Sumire hid her eyes with the back of her hand and did not reply. She was wrong. She had not messed up this time.

Zzzzt!

“You stopped...”

The lich glared down at Shin YuSung while emanating dark energy. The lich had currently absorbed the power of all the undead through its artifact. It was at peak condition. Even so, the human in front of it had blocked its attack with one hand.

“What are you...”

Tup!

Shin YuSung charged towards the lich.

Boom!

He slammed his foot into the ground right in front of the lich and threw his right fist at the monster.

Battle God Style Third Form – Heaven Shattering Fist Strike

Shin YuSung’s mana violently swirled around his fist.

Boobooboom!

The lich also coated its right hand in dark energy and threw a punch with it.

Zzzap!

Power versus power. Mana versus mana.

The two fists collided and created a shockwave.

* * *

* * *

The drone camera exploded from the force of the shockwave.

Bzt!

The spectators fell into shock as the monitor broadcasting Shin YuSung fizzled out.

“Did the lich seriously bring out an artifact, even though it’s super hard to defeat in the first place?”

“W-will they... really succeed in the double raid?”

“If they do, it really will be the first in the Association’s history...”

The guild scouts, broadcasters, reporters, and even the Association hunters gathered at the Association were watching the development surrounding Shin YuSung.

Han SeolAh from the Chinese team began talking to Liú Jùn with a serious expression on her face.

“...Are they actually going to do it?”

Liú Jùn did not reply.

The idea of doing a double raid in a competition where one's clear time was important had never even crossed his mind. The Japanese team, who had achieved third place, was also in shock.

“...One of the teams from Korea got second place while going solo. And the other team is going to... do a double raid?”

Seiji began to mumble, bemused at the situation. Sakura tried to reason with him.

“We don't know the results yet, Seiji. They'll only get the record if they exit the portal in fourth place, right?”

Vmm!

At that moment, the portal began to activate, shining with light. Adela, who had been lost in her thoughts, abruptly turned her head towards the source of the noise.

‘Is it really... ’

Adela's anticipation towards Shin YuSung was growing even bigger. Dissatisfied with a mere record, Shin YuSung had decided to try a double raid; On top of that, his opponent was a boss monster with an artifact. Adela's heart had started beating quickly before she had even known it.

‘That man?’

Adela's gaze landed on the portal.

Before she could even read the name of the dungeon inscribed on the portal, someone next to her began to mutter.

“...He really did it.”

Chaos descended upon the Association from those words.

“A double raid... during a competition!”

“This is big news! Take pictures, hurry!”

“This is reporter Yu HanNah, live at the Hunter Association!”

This was where, instead of the title of the disciple of the Fist King, Shin YuSung’s own name began to etch itself into history.

Chapter 26

To become the best at Skyscraper Academy, Liú Jùn had brought a great number of rivals to their knees.

His acceleration Trait that was classified as S-rank...

Swordsmanship that was polished under the tutelage of the greatest mentor, the Sword God...

He also spent half of his days, at minimum, refining his skills by devoting himself to training. As proof, he was 1st place in the day's competition.

‘...I can’t even laugh.’

Even so, Liú Jùn was not drunk on his victory. In fact, he was feeling a sense of loss while he was staring at Shin YuSung.

‘This is... ’

Even though his time was overwhelmingly faster than the other boy's, their runs were on different levels. Unlike the Chinese team, who had defeated one werewolf with their two members, the Korean team had each defeated a lich and a Dullahan. In fact, taking into account what Shin YuSung had done at the end, the entire raid could be considered a solo run.

‘This is not my victory.’

Shin YuSung's path towards becoming stronger, though difficult, was more effective—and he had eventually proven it. Liú Jùn did not appreciate this bitter sense of victory, despite his name being spread across news stations all across China.

‘...It seems like I still have a long way to go to become the greatest.’

It just so happened that what Liú Jùn wanted was the same as what the Hunter Association from China wanted for him.

China wanted an invincible hunter who would surpass his master, the Sword God.

Only with their backing could Liú Jùn protect what was important to him.

‘...This won’t happen next time.’

Liú Jùn turned his back on Shin YuSung and started to walk away. Only then did Han SeolAh, who had been giving him looks, call out towards him.

“Hey, uh... thanks for earlier.”

Han SeolAh was thankful for the fact that Liú Jùn had saved her from the werewolf. Liú Jùn turned his head and looked down at her. Some bandages, meant as first aid, were wrapped around her arm.

Han SeolAh scratched her head as she figured out what he was looking at—as if feeling awkward about the situation.

“Oh, this? I’m just gonna heal it back in China since our schedule right now is so full...”

Liú Jùn coldly glared at Han SeolAh’s arm.

“It’ll be in the way, then.”

“Uh, yeah, sorry...”

Wilting, Han SeolAh averted her gaze. Liú Jùn ignored her and moved on.

* * *

When all of the raids had been completed...

The Association, after concluding all of the planned events, finally began the ceremony to award the artifacts for the dungeon raid competition.

[1st – Liú Jùn (The Moonlit Holy Land)]

[Awarded Artifact – (Silver Moon Blade)]

Liú Jùn walked up to the podium as his name and detailed information popped up on the screen.

Kang YuChan, the Association president, let out a hearty laugh while looking at Liú Jùn below him.

“Watching you reminded me of my old comrade, the Sword God. No, your talent may even surpass his!”

“It is an honor.”

Liú Jùn gave a light nod to Kang YuChan and took the Silver Moon Blade. The blade of the sword was pure white as if it had absorbed the light from the moon, creating a wondrous effect.

[2nd – Adela (Astella Ice Castle)]

[Awarded Artifact – (10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal)]

Adela, who was next in line, stepped up on the podium. She received the jewel box containing the crystal without a single word.

The 10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal was an extraordinary artifact that was imbued with frost energy. Taking it as an elixir would strengthen her ice Trait.

As Adela left the podium, the Japanese team went up. Right after them, it was Shin YuSung’s turn. Kang YuChan was delighted.

“So they say you’ve completed a double raid, correct? The first in this competition’s history?”

“Yes.”

“Hur hur! So you decided to pursue strength, even during an event where you need to set a time record?”

Shin YuSung nodded his head. Kang YuChan laughed uproariously.

“That’s an answer any hunter worth their salt would give! It’s not like a student would have many opportunities to face off against a boss monster, after all! Hur hur!”

Kang YuChan had practically been treating Shin YuSung like he was his own student after they had met at the Academy.

“To think that the Black Dragon’s Hide has passed down from master to disciple. Yu WonHak must be completely beside himself!”

The Black Dragon’s Hide was a beautiful martial arts uniform made of black fabric and embroidered with gold.

Mei Lin, the manager of the competition, carefully spoke up.

“Mr. President. What should we do about the artifact that had dropped...”

“Hm, the dungeon itself is under the jurisdiction of the Association, but... we can’t just take away an artifact that a student has earned themselves. Give it to our YuSung.”

“As you wish.”

Mei Lin nodded at Kang YuChan’s words. As long as this man was here, the Association would be on Shin YuSung’s side.

“Thank you very much.”

“Yes. Do your best to become a shining beacon for Korea since we’ll be contacting you for the International Competition soon enough. Hur hur!”

As Kang YuChan left, Shin YuSung stepped down from the podium. He could see Sumire smiling and waving her hand among the throngs of students and spectators.

Even though Shin YuSung had been Sumire's partner during the school exam, this was the first time that he had ever seen her smile so brightly.

"Shin YuSung-ssi! Over here!"

Shin YuSung grinned and headed towards her.

* * *

While on the way back to the Academy, the internet was flooded with headlines and news articles about the competition.

[Shin YuSung VS Adela! Who will be the representative for Korea in the International Competition?]

[Double raid successfully completed with an F-rank Trait!]

[Student earns artifact during the raid. The first time this has happened in the Association's...]

Sumire began to mutter while checking the news with her old-fashioned phone.

"...I can't believe we actually won a reward from the competition."

Sumire still could not believe that what had happened was real. Until just a short while ago, Sumire had only the lowest grades among the first years so show. But now... she had won a competition.

It was completely unbelievable.

Sumire took her eyes off her phone to turn her gaze towards Shin YuSung.

“Of course... it was all due to Shin YuSung-ssi, though.”

Sumire thought back to her fight with the lich. Even though she had victory in her grasp, thanks to her plan with the undead, the lich’s artifact had instantly turned her efforts into a failure.

“If Shin YuSung-ssi didn’t arrive in time, I would have...”

Her worries had no basis in reality, however. Due to her efforts, Sumire was able to make the lich resort to using its artifact’s power earlier. Due to that, Shin YuSung was able to shorten the amount of time it took to clear the raid.

If he had beaten the raid too late, and the team had come in 5th place instead of 4th, they would not have been able to get any artifacts as a prize, despite successfully carrying out a double raid.

“No, Sumire. Thanks to you, the time needed to clear the dungeon was shortened considerably... So you had a crucial role in this competition.”

“...R-really?”

Sumire’s expression cleared as if finding comfort in Shin YuSung’s calm reply. Shin YuSung took something out of his Pocket and offered it to Sumire.

“...Speaking of. You should take this, Sumire.”

“Eh, what? Hieek! Th-this is!”

Sumire physically backed up, showing an incredible reaction to what was in his hand. It was the skeletal ring that the lich had been wearing.

“B-but this is an artifact...”

Sumire tried to refuse the offer by shaking her head. When she did so, Shin YuSung pressed a button on his Pocket.

“Look at this.”

Vmm!

A hologram appeared from the band.



<불사자의 반지> 레어

정보 - 절망의 묘지에 주인인 리치의 반지.
언데드를 강화 시키는 힘이 담겨 있다.

죽은 자의 주인(Skill) -
시전자가 보유한 마나에 비례해
언데드 몬스터를 소환한다.

절망의 암운(Skill) -
검은 구름으로 태양을 가리고,
구름 아래에 언데드를 강화 시킨다.

[<Immortal's Ring> Rare

Info - The ring owned by the ruler of the Graveyard of Despair,

the lich. It has a power that boosts the power of the undead.

Keeper of the Dead (Skill) –

Summons undead monsters based on the amount of mana used by the caster.

Fog of Despair (Skill) –

A dark fog moves to cover the sun. It strengthens the undead underneath its shade.

The ring's powers suited someone like Sumire, who was a necromancer; it was completely useless to Shin YuSung, who used martial arts.

“I don't need this.”

He also had the Black Dragon's Hide. It was obvious that Sumire, who had participated in the competition with him, should also have her share of the artifacts.

“Here, Sumire.”

Shin YuSung placed the ring in the girl's palm. Sumire looked up at the other boy and saw kind eyes and a smile looking down upon her. Sumire looked at the ring in her hand with a dazed expression.

“Shin YuSung-ssi gave me this ring...” she muttered under her breath.

“Try it on,” he suggested.

Sumire became startled, and her face, along with her ears, quickly turned into a shade of red.

“M-maybe next... I... I-I! I-I'm sorry!” she replied hurriedly.

Taptaptaptap.

Sumire walked past Shin YuSung and made her way back to the Academy at a faster pace.

* * *

In the concentration room, located in the west training room of the Academy, Adela opened the jewel box in the soundproof room.

Sshh!

A white mist began to emanate from the orb-like ice crystal. At first glance, it resembled any old piece of ice, but it held enough chilly air to freeze someone to the bone.

Adela looked at the 10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal for a good amount of time.

‘...So this is the Ice Crystal.’

The 10,000 Year Old Ice Crystal was an artifact mainly used to imbue a blade or an accessory with the power of ice.

But to hunters like Adela, who had ice-related Traits or Skills, the Crystal could be used in a different matter.

‘It’s cold.’

Adela picked up the 10,000 Year Old Ice Crystal with her fingers. Even to Adela, who controlled ice, the crystal was too cold for her.

‘If I put this in my mouth... ’

It meant that she would have to bear the incredible chill from the crystal with just her body. It was an unreasonable challenge—a normal person’s insides would be completely frozen over.

Adela blankly stared at the 10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal. Adela didn’t really need the help of an artifact like this.

She was the strongest in Gaon Academy, the one who had never lost. Despite being an exchange student from Italy, she had become the strongest student among all the first years in South Korea—a country known to produce strong hunters.

But Shin YuSung had made her, someone who had never lost a fight, nervous.

He had attempted a double raid during the competition and had succeeded.

[This man could...]

Adela had felt anticipation as she watched Shin YuSung's exploits during the competition. She remembered the heart-pounding stories of combat that her grandfather had told her when she was young. Her desire to win, something that she had never experienced before, was pumping blood through her heart.

[Definitely.]

Shin YuSung was a turning point for Adela, whose Academy life had been cold and dry due to her overwhelming strength.

This was why Adela had to be at peak condition for the greatest match.

Nom.

Adela placed the Ice Crystal in her mouth.

The 10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal, once hard as ice, instantly melted as soon as it hit Adela's tongue. All that was left behind was the violent chill that the crystal had contained.

Adela felt frightened.

It felt like the blood in her veins was freezing over.

“...Mmph.”

Adela scrunched up her face and held her breath. To absorb the artifact and strengthen her Trait and Skills, she had to spread the chill throughout her body.

She closed her eyes.

The chill from the crystal began to permeate her body, inflicting unimaginable pain. But Aedla did not so much as let out a whimper.

She merely concentrated quietly.

Sshhh!

Like that, one hour passed.



Adela, who had fallen into meditation, slowly opened her eyes as if waking up from sleep. Frost covered the area around her.

“...It’s cold,” she mumbled in the middle of this winter-like scene.

Adela crossed her arms over each other and shivered. The Queen of Winter was—despite her impressions—the sort of person who got cold easily.

Chapter 27

Gaon Academy's training room...

The students were training with all of their strength with the state-of-the-art equipment.

"Your physical strength rank is still D?"

"Hey, it takes more than just a day or two for physical abilities to level up, okay?"

Some students honed their physical abilities.

"Water Dragon Blast!"

And others trained their skills using dummy robots. The training room was bustling.

But as the door to the room opened and Shin YuSung entered the room...

Vmm!

Everyone's gazes turned to the door as if they had rehearsed it.

"Oh, it's Shin YuSung."

"...The competition was yesterday, and he's immediately training?"

"Competition?"

"Didn't you hear about the double raid yesterday?"

The students started gossiping about Shin YuSung, who had become

the center of attention. The D Class students were the ones who showed the strongest reaction to him.

“...That’s Shin YuSung, right?”

The class president of D Class.

As Park* HaWon asked this, Kang MinSu nodded his head.

“You know, the guy who destroyed Ju HaJin with one strike.”

Park HaWon fiddled with her glasses as she stared at Shin YuSung.

“Yeah. Even though he’s an idiot and his personality is the worst, he isn’t half bad at fighting...”

“So I’m saying it’ll be a stupid move to fight Shin YuSung head-on.”

At Kang MinSu’s words, Park HaWon scrunched up her expression out of nervousness.

“Haah...! And we were all excited about fighting F Class, too! If we get last place in the intramurals, we won’t even be able to do our extracurriculars!”

Jin MinAh, who had been listening to their conversation up to that point, carefully spoke up.

“Um, still... we’ll win as long as we stop Shin YuSung in some way, right?”

Sung IkHyun snorted as if belittling Jin MinAh.

“How?” he asked, an expression on his face suggesting that he had heard nonsense.

Park HaWon, the class president.

The second-strongest member of D Class, Kang MinSu.

And all of the other D Class members who had been in the training room, including Jin MinAh, were silent.

This was, of course, due to Shin YuSung's strength. No one in D Class had ever defeated a rank 4 boss monster before. But Shin YuSung had done so three times: the crystal golem, the lich, and the Dullahan.

On top of that, Shin YuSung had yet to lose a single time in a fight.

Only he knew the extent of his full power. He was on a completely different level when compared to the D Class students.

Sung IkHyun, who had a fairly good head on his shoulders, began giving advice to the class president.

“Prez, ignore what she's saying. The best thing we can do is just avoid him as much as possible. You know the rules for the intramurals, right? It's to destroy the other team using numbers. We need to win against them using that.”

“Hm...”

Lost in thought, Park HaWon quickly threw a glance at Shin YuSung. She could see him on the other side of the glass between them, she could also see the electronic billboard in the Image Room which was displaying a shockingly difficulty level.

[Difficulty 4-3]

Shin YuSung had chosen 4-3, which was where you had to fight three rank 4 monsters.

Park HaWon began to mumble in a listless manner.

“...An F Class student doing 4-3. Haa, this is insane.”

She continued to speak while adjusting her glasses, settling her mind.

“...You're right. We definitely can't win against something like that.”

To the D Class students, Shin YuSung was too strong of an opponent for them. What they needed was a plan that could overcome his oppressive combat abilities.

* * *

Shin YuSung, who had entered the Image Room, raised the difficulty to 4-3. The students were gawking at him in wonder. Of course, this was not the first time that he had been observed like this, but it was for a different reason.

The reason why the students had been watching Shin YuSung until now was because he was the disciple of the Fist King, a man who had hidden himself from the public view.

But things had changed.

Shin YuSung had become the center of attention entirely through his own skills and achievements.

Some people admired him for his incredible skills, despite having an F-rank Trait, and others were kept in check with their fear of him. Some students even had the desire to try and win against him.

‘...How interesting.’

A pleased smile grew on Shin YuSung’s face.

Because of his F-rank Trait, he had been abandoned by his family when he was five years old. And—while the Fist King deeply cared for Shin YuSung—he was a tough love kind of person.

During the twelve years he spent on Martial Spirits’ Mountain, Shin YuSung had always thought that his skills would never be good enough and had wanted to find a way to prove his own worth.

The Shin-oh family that had abandoned him,

The Fist King who had believed in his potential,

And those in despair due to Traits—he wanted to prove himself to them all. It was what had motivated Shin YuSung, even when he was just a young boy.

Now, it felt like he had gotten one step closer to that goal. He had finally climbed onto the path that would lead him to becoming the strongest hunter.

[Practice monsters. Difficulty: Rank 4, 3 Lesser Demons setting.]

The holographic projector spewed light at the same time as the announcement rang out.

Ssh!

A short demon wielding a weapon.

A large, muscular demon.

A tall, willowy demon.

As the various demons stared him down, another announcement rang throughout the Image Room.

[Demons are beings with intelligence. The challenger can set their A.I. level]

Shin YuSung looked at the demons and clenched his fist. In order to attain his goal, there was only one thing he had to do.

‘I have to become stronger.’

[How advanced would you like to set their A.I.?)

Shin YuSung did not have a choice in the matter.

“As advanced as possible.”

As soon as he gave his answer, the intelligence of the demons

increased, and they began to get into formation, synchronized. Seeing them do so, Shin YuSung got into a stance as well.

‘Let’s begin.’

Shin YuSung had gotten used to the Academy’s training methods.



* * *

Three minutes. That was how long it had taken Shin YuSung to clear

Difficulty 4-3 after entering the Image Room.

“He... he’s insane.”

“He beat up those rank 4s with just his fists...”

The higher rank students stared at Shin YuSung with a shocked look in their eyes. The way he fought was different from what they were used to.

Unlike the other hunters who relied on the strength of their Traits, Shin YuSung used martial arts that completely relied on his physical strength.

“Wow, this is the first time I’ve seen this...”

“D-don’t you think he might be stronger than Adela?”

His physique was born from the nine blocked yin pathways and abundance of heavenly yang.

His fighting style was learned from the greatest martial artist, the Fist King. It was understandable why the other students would be in an uproar about it.

Vnn.

The door opened, and Shin YuSung stepped out of the Image Room. As he did so, the armband-shaped Pocket on his wrist began to display a hologram.

[New record attained for Difficulty 4-3!]

[Name: Shin YuSung]

[Clear Record: 3 minutes 11 seconds]

Shin YuSung’s clear record for 4-3 was the fastest in Gaon Academy.

He observed the changes in his body.

‘My body feels light.’

Hunters grew stronger with experience.

In particular instances, like Sumire’s, one could further awaken their Trait and receive a new Skill.

But Shin YuSung had recently fought and defeated 3 boss monsters. His various experiences had unlocked a higher level of his physical capabilities.

‘Nothing beats actual combat experience.’

When he was about to make his way out of the training room, his Pocket began to vibrate.

Someone had sent him a message.

[Headmaster Jin ByungCheol: Student Shin YuSung... Sorry to bother you when you’re busy... but can you... come to the headmaster’s office right now? ^ ^]

Jin ByungCheol’s text was even more polite than ever. It was like his disrespectful attitude from when he had first met Shin YuSung had never existed in the first place. The boy had become the academy’s VIP.

[Headmaster Jin ByungCheol: PS. Take your time coming here. And would you like to drink anything? ^ ^]

As proof, Jin ByungCheol—one of the people with the most authority in the Academy—was offering him a drink, something he only did for VIPs.

‘He really is a kind man.’

Taking Jin ByungCheol’s snobbish goodwill at face value, Shin YuSung

gave a pleased smile.

* * *

The headmaster's office of Gaon Academy.

Jin ByungCheol sat upon a luxurious chair and gave a business-like smile to Shin YuSung, who returned it with his own.

"You called for me?"

"Haha, come in, come in!"

The headmaster's kindness towards Shin YuSung was a given.

'It'll be a huge loss if this golden goose ever transfers to another school.'

Jin ByungCheol constantly acted nice towards the boy.

"It's nothing, really. I just wanted to talk to student Shin YuSung about... no! That title sounds much too distant, considering our relationship!"

Jin ByungChoel did not hesitate to bring up the Fist King's name.

"Yes! The Fist King is my senior and someone like a mentor to me. Our YuSung is the disciple of my senior. Aren't we more like fellow students under him?"

Jin ByungCheol used his own weapon, his silver tongue, to appeal to Shin YuSung. The one being appealed to nodded his head as if he had been convinced.

"Mhm!"

"YuSung-ah, even if I can't show you any favoritism at this Academy for the sake of equal treatment of all students, what we have is unique."

“Thank you, headmaster!” said Shin YuSung, as he replied with a bright grin on his face.

Jin ByungCheol smiled pleasantly and switched topics.

“It’s nothing, really, but... The president of the Association contacted me.”

“The president, you mean...”

Kang YuChan.

He was the president of the Hutner Association, as well as one of the strongest hunters in Korea alongside the Fist King.

That legendary figure had personally contacted the Academy. This was why Jin ByungCheol, the headmaster, had called for Shin YuSung.

He handed over a piece of paper over the table to Shin YuSung in a proud manner.

“Here! This is the invitation that the Association has sent to you and Adela.”

[Academy National Representative Selection]

[Venue: Busan]

[Requirements: First year, one of the Sevens]

[Candidate 1: Adela Ortensia]

[Candidate 2: Shin YuSung]

The selection for the national representative who would compete in the International Competition... As an event that decided the overall status of nations in the international sphere through the first years attending academies, the International Competition was both a sign of friendly competition and an event of great honor.

To Jin ByungCheol, the International Competition was a golden opportunity to raise the value of Gaon Academy.

“Many students will participate in the selection, but the representative has to come from our Gaon Academy, don’t you think? Your score in the competition isn’t everything in these selections.”

“I know. Votes matter too, right?”

At Shin YuSung’s reply, the headmaster nodded his head. The International Competition was an event where the one student who participated in it was the representative of an entire nation. Even though the representative had to create a party to participate in the competition with them, they were still considered the face of the nation.

That was why the representative was chosen through both the score they achieved in the selections as well as the votes that they had received.

“If you want to be the representative, you’ll need a high level of prominence.”

“Prominence...”

“Well, you’ve been on K Channel news before, so I’m not too worried about that. Still, the reason why it’s so important for students to do their extracurricular activities is because it’s important for a hunter to be popular.”

The voting rule was, if one looked at it a certain way, both advantageous and disadvantageous for Shin YuSung.

Shin YuSung was someone of great note for the performance he had shown in the double raid and due to being the disciple of the Fist King. However, he had participated in very few extracurriculars and therefore had low popularity.

It was a given that the students who had left the confines of their school to directly help society would receive the support of the citizens.

If left unchecked, it was completely possible for someone to perform well in the selections but still lose by the votes.

Click.

Shin YuSung kept thinking about it after leaving the office.

‘...Prominence and popularity. This is hard.’

Shin YuSung, who had lived on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain for 12 years, couldn’t think of a good answer to this problem. In the Academy, some of the students had been building their popularity through extracurriculars from a young age. Among them, some had used their Trait to appear in advertisements, like Adela with her ice Trait for a refrigerator commercial.

[The Shinsung group’s refrigerator that even the ice barrier hunter, Adela, recommends!]

Even though it was a fairly simple advertisement, the video of it showing Adela raising a thumbs up with her expressionless face had garnered over a million views. Shin YuSung had to defeat celebrities like Adela and claim first place.

‘...Hm, before that, I’ll definitely have to take care of the intramurals, right?’

Finishing his musings, Shin YuSung turned towards the direction of F Class, where Sumire and Lee SiWoo were. If he didn’t want to be stopped from participating in extracurricular activities, he had to prevent F Class from losing in the first round. Thankfully, this was something that Shin YuSung was good at.

* The author inexplicably changes So HaWon (first introduced in chapter 20)’s last name in this chapter, and it stays changed throughout the rest of the novel.

Chapter 28

A Class, during their break...

It was forbidden to be ‘loud’, as per the class president Kim EunAh’s orders, but someone fearlessly opened the door to the classroom and began to shout.

“Hey guys, I’m here!”

*Whhr, slam!**

Kim EunAh, who had been sitting on a desk, almost dropped her phone in surprise.

“...Who the hell?”

Furious, she grimaced and turned her gaze towards the door. The student in question began running towards Kim EunAh.

“It’s EunAhhhhhh!”

Pink hair that could remind someone of cherry blossoms...

A girl with a short stature threw her body towards Kim EunAh and caught her in an embrace.

“How did my EunAh do without me? Course, I bet it must’ve been awful since I wasn’t here!”

The owner of this bubbly personality was Amy, a transfer student from America and a popular broadcaster. Due to this, she often went out on extracurriculars and rarely went to school. She was the sole student in A Class who could act friendly around Kim EunAh.

“Hey! Get off me!”

Kim EunAh forcibly tore Amy away from her as the other girl began to rub her face in her stomach.

“Heh heh, EunAh~ we’re friends, right?”

Even as Kim EunAh did this, Amy was grinning widely. Of course, Amy wanted something else from the other girl.

“You’re second in the student rankings, so you’re going to be in the Representative Selection? Right? Hmm~?”

As a streamer, Amy wanted broadcasting rights for the Representative Selection event from Kim EunAh. She tried to appeal to the other girl by twisting her body one way or another; Kim EunAh replied to her with a bitter expression.

“It isn’t me, though?”

“Heh heh, there you go agaaaain! Don’t joke around~”

Amy crinkled her eyes jokingly, as if not believing the other girl. She poked Kim EunAh’s side.

“It isn’t me.”

Kim EunAh repeated it again with a straight face.

Amy’s eyes widened as she finally understood the situation.

“Ehhhhhhh!?” she screamed.

Kim EunAh scratched her ear at Amy’s overexaggerated reaction and continued to speak.

“Sorry to say, but I didn’t get chosen for it.”

“H-how! I know you’ve never won against Adela even once, but aren’t

you still super strong?”

“You wanna die? I’m gonna beat her soon, okay?”

Kim EunAh glared at Amy, who had collapsed on the floor in shock. Amy had already promised the news station a spot, believing in Kim EunAh’s skill. She had also told her viewers that she had the broadcasting rights for Gaon Academy in the Representative Selection.

To think that Kim EunAh, who she had believed in, did not actually make it to the selection. Amy began mumbling to herself, still on the floor.

“My life is ruined...”

“What, hey! Is that all it takes for you to get depressed?”

For reasons unknown, Kim EunAh was oddly weak towards Amy. Kim EunAh felt bothered when she saw Amy’s shoulders sag.

“...Why don’t you go and ask the person who was actually chosen, then?”

“Who? Don’t tell me... Adela?”

Amy gulped as she imagined the girl in her head.

“Y-you want me to ask Adela... if I can film her? N-no way! She’ll... definitely freeze me!”

After Amy’s spar against Adela, which lasted two seconds with her complete defeat, just thinking about the other girl made her shudder.

“After she does that, she’ll grind me up whenever she wants to eat some shaved ice... with strawberry syrup...”

Amy began muttering in fear. Seeing this, Kim EunAh sighed.

“No, not Adela. Shin YuSung,” she replied.

“Shin YuSung? Who’s that again?”

Amy tilted her head in confusion. Kim EunAh gave a curt response.

“The transfer student.”

“Ah, the rumored~! Wow, then the transfer student immediately stole your place at the Representative Selection? Damn, that’s sick...”

Amy wasn’t very aware of what went on in the school due to her busy broadcasting schedule. Actually, she had no interest in it.

“If I search him, he’ll pop up, then! Let’s have a look-see.”

Her search returned a flood of K Channel broadcasts. Amy clicked one of the videos and—soon enough—had an awestricken expression on her face.

“W-wow...”

To Amy, a streamer, Shin YuSung’s existence was in and of itself a shock.

“He’s really...”

Amy was sincerely impressed.

Of course, what had caught her eye was not his skills but something else.

“...hot!!”

Amy muttered under her breath as if she had found a precious jewel. Shin YuSung’s beauty was more than sufficient for the star quality needed to be on air.

Amy smiled happily, thinking of her rose-tinted future.

‘What if I partner with this guy!? And on top of that, if I can broadcast

the Representative Selection? Heh, fufu...

She imagined being the shining light of the news station... Endless applause... A stream of donations from the viewers!

‘I’m giddy just thinking about it!’

Amy grinned, satisfied, and turned her shining eyes towards Kim EunAh.

“I... I-I’ve decided!”

Amy began talking to her without caring about the fact that Kim EunAh was looking at her phone, indifferent.

“This man shall be my partner!”

Amy seemed to greatly like Shin YuSung, even referring to him in a polite manner.



* * *

Gaon Academy's cafeteria.

The cafeteria was ostentatious enough that its buffet rivalled the quality of those in hotels.

“As expected, this is also really delicious.”

But no matter how delicious the food was, Shin YuSung was the only one who had cleaned four plates of it.

“YuSung-ah, you really are good at eating. I... can’t even finish two plates without my stomach crying out for mercy,” muttered Lee SiWoo, impressed.

As Shin YuSung looked at the food on his plate, he thought back to Martial Spirits’ Mountain.

The concept of a meal did not exist to Shin YuSung on that mountain—every moment was dedicated to training and survival.

If there was a lake next to where he was training, he fished. If there was a forest nearby, he ate fruits. Shin YuSung had not taken time to enjoy food—he had fed off the environment.

Even without much to eat, he was never afraid of starving. This was all just a natural concept to Shin YuSung.

“Oops.”

He accidentally dropped some fried chicken from his chopsticks. As that happened, Sumire caught the chicken midair with incredible reflexes.

“Oh~ nice catch.”

Lee SiWoo clapped as he saw Sumire’s chopstick maneuvers.

“Oh, um, Shin YuSung-ssi...”

Sumire glanced at Shin YuSung, then stretched out the piece of chicken between her chopsticks towards him.

“...H-here you go!”

“Thank you, Sumire.”

Shin YuSung took the chicken.

After he did so, Sumire blankly stared at the spot where her chopsticks had touched his.

For three seconds...

Sumire's face suddenly grew red from wherever her imagination had led her.

“Why did you stop eating?”

Sumire flinched at Lee SiWoo's question as if she had been caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

“...Eek!? N-nothing!”

Sumire resumed slowly poking at her food with her chopsticks. Lee SiWoo looked at her in a dissatisfied manner, leaning his chin on one hand.

“So gloomy.”

At that moment, a bright and cheerful voice, in complete contrast to Sumire, called for Shin YuSung.

“Found you!”

Amy Rose.**

Gaon Academy's most popular celebrity, at least 10,000 viewers watched her streams the moment they went live. Amy began talking to herself, complimenting Shin YuSung's looks.

“Wow! He looks even hotter in person!”

Amy stared at Shin YuSung with an exhilarated expression. The other students in the cafeteria turned their gazes towards her.

“It’s Amy!”

“Was she supposed to be at school today?”

“But she’s talking to the F Class students.”

She was popular enough that her appearance somewhere was enough for people to gossip about it. Amy looked around her vicinity.

“Hey, I have something I need to say to you! Can we go somewhere quiet that isn’t this cafeteria?” she asked.

Amy’s eyes were glittering.

Shin YuSung gave a quick glance at his empty plate, then nodded his head.

“Sure.”

Shin YuSung and Amy left the cafeteria in a rather sudden manner. Lee SiWoo began to mutter, impressed.

“...As expected of YuSung.”

“What?”

Sumire expressed her puzzlement at the boy’s impressed words. Seeing this, Lee SiWoo clicked his tongue and shook his head.

“You haven’t noticed already? What do you think Amy would want to talk to Shin YuSung about at a quiet location?”

“Th-that’s...”

The blood drained from Sumire’s face. Lee SiWoo continued to mutter with a confident expression on his face.

“I really am observant. If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.”

On the other hand, Sumire was staring at her plate and holding back tears.

* * *

The Academy’s park, where the lake was visible...

Amy took out a white desk from her wrist Pocket. It amazed Shin YuSung that such a large item could fit in her wristwatch-sized Pocket.

The girl sat at the desk with practiced motions.

“Kay, ‘kay! Let’s first sit down and have a chat!”

“Sounds good.”

This was the first time that Shin YuSung had met Amy face-to-face, but he already had the gist from the headmaster.

[Our YuSung is so popular that even news stations could come and contact you! Even some of our students fall under that category. Their names are...]

Amy was among the list of names that the headmaster Jin ByungCheol had given him. With the help of the fans and popularity that Amy had built up through her broadcasts, Shin YuSung could instantly boost his prominence.

It was important for a hunter to boost one’s own prominence. It was, of course, crucial for the Representative Selection’s voting portion, but it also helped with the extracurriculars that he would participate in afterwards.

There were a limited number of skilled students in the academy.

For Shin YuSung, who had his hands full with both the Selection and with gathering team members for the intramurals, Amy approaching him was a great opportunity.

“So you currently run a broadcasting program, and you’re quite popular, right?”

Amy aggressively nodded her head at Shin YuSung’s lead-in.

“Yes! Correct! It seems like our talk will be short! I thought it would be! I heard you were chosen for the Representative Selection. If you want to be chosen as the representative for the entire nation, then popularity is absolutely essential!”

Like she had just said, both his prowess in the selection and the votes from the citizens were important. Having a high level of skill was a must, but participants who were popular and more familiar to the public had an advantage.

“But you’ll have a tough time beating Adela in popularity, don’t you think?”

Amy smirked and moved her eyebrows up and down. Unlike Shin YuSung, who had spent 12 years on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain, Adela had appeared on TV and had perfectly completed various extracurricular activities.

It was a fact that Shin YuSung was losing out to her in that aspect.

“That’s true,” he replied calmly.

Amy quickly stood up from her seat in response.

“However...!”

Grinning, she clasped her hands together and began to rub them together in an effort to charm the boy.

“It’ll be a different story with my support, heh heh!”

Amy was skilled at flattery, possibly due to her early debut in society.

“If you just let me have the broadcasting rights for the Selection, this broadcasting genius will help you in this endeavor with all of her heart!”

It was a perfect appeal and shining eyes from Amy. Shin YuSung leaned his chin on one hand and began muttering with an indifferent expression on his face.

“Is that so?”

Amy was thrown off by Shin YuSung’s apathetic response.

“Are those all of the conditions?” he asked in a steady voice.

Amy nodded her head with an expression on her face that implied that she now understood what he was talking about.

“Ah, ahh~ so that’s what that was about! Man, I must be out of it! Of course, we’ll split the donation money 50/50!”

Amy easily put forth an outrageous condition. But Shin YuSung still looked dissatisfied.

“Th-this... isn’t good.”

Amy broke out in a cold sweat as she became more and more thrown. Shin YuSung slowly began to state the condition that he wanted.

“You know that I’ll need a party in the case that I win in the Representative Selection, right?”

“R-right? There’s only one representative, but there’s also a lot of team-based events in the International Competition.”

Amy nodded, face scrunched up in confusion.

“I’m currently very lacking in team members.”

Hearing this, Amy realized what condition he wanted.

“...N-no way.”

“Yep. Join my party. Oh, of course, that is only in the case where I win in the Representative Selection.”

In preparation for students like Amy approaching him, Shin YuSung had created a plan to win them over to his side in advance.

Of course, it was a difficult feat to get someone as popular and skilled as Amy as his party member, even among the A Class students.

But Shin YuSung had an ace up his sleeve—the broadcasting rights.

“Um... I dunno, anything can happen, so forming a party with you is a little...”

Amy was sweating.

It was proof that the broadcasting rights that Shin YuSung was offering her was that attractive to her. Instead of trying to pull her in and coax her further, he tried pushing her away.

“Is that so? I really need team members right now. If it’s too hard for you, I think I can probably look for someone from a different academy.”

“Uh, uhh... you can’t! Waah! Please reconsider that!”

Amy was brought to tears by her and Shin YuSung’s tug-of-war. She desperately wanted the broadcasting rights for the Representative Selection.

The first reason was because of the promise she had made to the news station and her viewers.

The second was the desire she possessed to become an even more popular streamer.

Amy couldn't afford to give up the chance to broadcast the Selection. Shin YuSung smiled.

'I guess this is the time to pull her in.'

Shin YuSung checked the time with his Pocket, then asked a question to the fretting Amy.

"Looks like it's almost time for class. Have you decided yet?"

No matter how much she mulled over it, the answer was already set in stone. Eventually, Amy bowed her head to Shin YuSung.

"I will join your team, Mr. Leader!"

She was completely lost to Shin YuSung's push and pull tactic.

Chapter 29

An emergency meeting was held at Gaon Academy.

Looking at each and every staff member seated around the U-shaped table, Headmaster Jin ByungCheol laughed boisterously.

“Huh huh! You all watched the Dungeon Raid Competition that was hosted by the Association, correct?”

Even if China’s Skyscraper Academy took home first place, the second and fourth place were students from Gaon Academy: Adela and Shin YuSung.

“Our school’s prestige is being heightened through the incredible exploits of our first-year students.”

Seeing that the headmaster was in a good mood, Lin Xiao quickly began flattering the man in an effort to make up for the Jewel Island incident.

“This is all due to your excellent guidance, is it not?”

“Well, I’d say that it’s due to our YuSung and student Adela. I haven’t done anything, huh huh!”

The atmosphere became exuberant and a little more casual because of the talk about Shin YuSung and Adela. Jin ByungCheol had to belatedly pose the problem that he had gathered everyone to discuss.

“I never thought that this would be a problem, but... ahem, student Adela absorbed the 10,000-Year-Old Ice Crystal.”

Adela had become stronger due to it.

The ice crystal boosted the strength of her ice Trait, and she might

even have gained a new Skill from it. However, it was forbidden to use artifacts for school exams like the intramurals. It was impossible to take the crystal's boost away from Adela only for tests since she had already absorbed it.

“So she broke the rules,” said a female professor wearing glasses.

So HaeJung creased her forehead. Even before her career as a teacher, she had placed great importance on following the rules.

Lin Xiao snorted at So HaeJung's words.

“How is this breaking the rules? The rules only state that students can't be *in possession* of an artifact.”

“Even so, Adela is currently strengthened by an artifact since the ice crystal has been absorbed into her body. Am I wrong?”

So HaeJung did not back down from Lin Xiao's retort. The other instructors were quiet, absorbed in thought, and unable to give an answer easily. Eventually, Jin ByungCheol opened his mouth.

“Please calm down, you two. It's true that there are a lot of loopholes in the exam's rules, so let's treat this case as an exception.”

There had never been a case at Gaon Academy where a student had absorbed an artifact-grade elixir in their student years until this moment, which was why Jin ByungCheol thought up another method.

“However. It would be imbalanced if only Adela was allowed to use an artifact.”

So HaeJung slowly nodded at his words.

“Correct. Student Adela's classroom, S Class, is already the strongest one out of all of the first-year classes. It is unreasonable that a student from that S Class is the only one who can use an artifact's power.”

So HaeJung continued to talk lengthily without a single mistake in her intonation or pronunciation, Jin ByungCheol coughed.

“Ahem, which is why... I have decided to let students use artifacts in this exam.”

Lin Xiao began mumbling to himself with a sour expression on his face as the headmaster made his shocking announcement, even forgetting to kiss up to the man.

“...A-allowing artifacts?”

The instructors who were listening to Jin ByungCheol eventually began to speak up as well.

“Then the balance of the classrooms will...”

“Headmaster. What about the students without artifacts...”

“And on top of that, it’s the intramural competition... it’s hard enough to keep the students under control as it is...”

But it wasn’t like Jin ByungCheol had come to this decision without putting too much thought into it.

“A-hum, please listen to me first. During the intramurals, it is S Class and A Class who are paired up with each other, no? And who is in A Class?”

In A Class, there was the student who was second in the student rankings:

The granddaughter of the Shinsung group’s chairman, Kim EunAh.

“Ahh, come to think of it, I heard that student EunAh also has an artifact...”

“Not just one or two, I bet? Since they weren’t earned in competitions but bought with money.”

As they had said, Kim EunAh had been showered with gifts from the chairman. It wasn’t a problem for her to choose one of them to use for

the exam.

“What about the other classes, then...”

Jin ByungCheol began to show a bothered expression at So HaeJung’s question.

“A-hum, we can just give an exception for each class, no? Since I believe that there’s at least one artifact per class. Let’s do that, then.”

As he said this, one of the instructors carefully spoke up.

“But, headmaster. If you think about it, doesn’t F Class... now have two artifacts?”

There was no way Jin ByungCheol didn’t know that Shin YuSung and Sumire both had artifacts. He had not brought it up because he was 100% on Shin YuSung’s side.

‘Good eye. I’ve been doing this all for our YuSung, after all.’

There was a rule that the class in last place couldn’t do any extracurriculars.

‘Wouldn’t it be a huge problem if YuSung couldn’t go to the Representative Selection because of those rules?’

Jin ByungCheol laughed at the instructor’s question and gave a reply.

“Well, the reason why F Class has two artifacts is because they showed great prowess during the Dungeon Raid competition... as long as we’ve allowed artifacts, it wouldn’t be fair to single them out based on quantity, would it?”

The instructor could not take any further issue with F Class, as the headmaster had spoken.

“Now, now. Let’s end the meeting, then.”

Jin ByungCheol had looked out for Shin YuSung without the boy's knowledge.

* * *

In the classroom after the end of school...

Sumire, alone in the room, looked at the Immortal's Ring and muttered to herself in a small voice.

“...The ring that Shin YuSung-ssi gave me...”

The artifact, Immortal's Ring.

Even if the ring was Sumire's part of the rewards for participating in the raid, it was also a present from Shin YuSung, the team leader. As she stared at the ring, she remembered the sight of Shin YuSung protecting her against the lich.

[...To think that you cornered a boss with an artifact of such power.]

She hadn't somehow ruined the dungeon clear and had not disappointed the person who had believed in her. This was a huge relief to her.

[...It really is a good thing that I signed you up for this raid.]

Shin YuSung's words then came to mind. Unable to stop them, the corners of Sumire's mouth curved up.

“...U, heehee.”

It was a laugh that Lee SiWoo would call creepy if he had seen it. Sumire's delusions did not stop there. She was completely lost in her happy musings, carressing the ring around her ring finger.

‘A ring... ’

In Japan, giving someone a ring was tantamount to a proposal.

‘Shin YuSung-ssi gave me a...’

Sumire’s face became redder and redder to her growing delusions, and she missed the fact that the door to the classroom had slid open.

‘I’m already busy enough as it is... huh?’

Renia, who had happened to come back to the classroom to pick up an item she had forgotten, stopped walking as soon as she saw Sumire with her back turned to her.

‘...Looks like someone else was here.’

But something seemed unusual with the other girl.

“Fu, huhu, heeheehee...”

Sumire was laughing unpleasantly in front of the window, the glow of the sunset bathing her in harsh orange light. The top of the ring reacted to her mana and released a dark aura.



‘What’s going on?! That’s terrifying!’

In tears, Renia backed up and ran out of the room without even

retrieving her item.

‘I-I’ll have to get it next time!’

Sumire had scared Renia without even meaning to do so.

* * *

The high-class dorms of the Sevens...

After returning to the dorms, Shin YuSung checked the Pocket’s information on the Black Dragon’s Hide on a hologram.

‘So I can take a look at items without taking them out of the Pocket, huh.’

The Pockets that hunters had strapped to their wrists were incredibly useful, as they had many functions.

Notably, after the book ‘Tower Records’ was found in a dungeon, almost all information regarding artifacts was inputted into the Pockets.

[<Black Dragon’s Hide> Rare

Info – Clothes given as a reward while clearing the Tower. The golden dragons embroidered onto the fabric bless the owner with reinforcement magic.

Heavenly Rotation of the Black Dragon (Skill) –

Turns the mana used by the caster for this Skill into a protective shield.

Black Dragon’s Ripple (Skill) –

Sends out the mana used by the caster for this Skill in a shockwave pattern.

Thanks to that, Shin YuSung could read up on the Black Dragon's Hide in one organized place.

‘Heavenly Rotation of the Black Dragon, and the Black Dragon's Ripple.’

These two Skills perfectly complemented the weaknesses of a martial artist. Heavenly Rotation of the Black Dragon was a shield that could block long-range attacks, while the Black Dragon's Ripple could attack enemies at a distance using his mana.

‘These are both Skills that I absolutely need.’

Artifacts could be used as much as one wanted during the newly updated intramurals as well as in the Representative Selections.

With this artifact's powers adding to Shin YuSung's already monstrous skills, he was more or less soaring over the competition. But winning in the Representative Selection was equivalent to representing all academies in South Korea. He could not let his guard down.

‘Let's do my best and not rely on the artifact's power.’

Beep.

It was the text from Amy that he had been waiting for. Shin YuSung raised his cellphone and took a look at her message.

[Amy♥: here're the files with all~ the rules for the intramurals!]

There was an attached file that came with the text.

‘She works fast, as expected.’

Amy was actually very efficient with her work, even if her perpetually smiling face gave off a different impression. As soon as she had heard of the theme for the D Class and F Class exam, she had asked her senior for an organized file of the rules for the exam and had sent it to Shin YuSung.

[Amy♥: let's destroy the intramurals for the sake of the representative selections! bam! (๑•`□•´๑)/

Shin YuSung had to grin at Amy's exuberant text message, but only for a moment. He checked the file.

[Test Theme: Hunter VS Villain]

[Hunters' Objective: Stop the villains]

[Villains' Objective: Succeed in your plan]

Hunter VS Villain.

This was the name of the theme of the intramural exam. Information about the test was written on the bottom of the file in great detail.

Most of it was about what year the test was taking place and the specifics of the plan given to the villains.

‘...So this is the kind of exam this is... And F Class are the hunters.’

The plans written in the file were similar to actual crimes committed by villains in real life.

‘Stealing artifacts, terrorism in public areas, kidnapping celebrities... there sure is a lot in here.’

There were many hunters that had become villains after committing a crime, despite the incredible strength of their Traits. Those labelled as villains had a warrant out for their arrest and became enemies of the nation.

The intramurals being held this time had this theme in order to train the students to think like a villain, thus raising their understanding of the crimes being committed. It was also good practice for catching villains.

Amy, of course, had a different real reason for why she sent the file.

‘Special Scoring Clause.’

It was an open secret, but students who had exceptional showings during the intramurals had their own scoring system, despite the exam being group-based.

[Rescuing a kidnapped civilian – 3 points]

[Reclaim stolen artifact – 3 points]

[Suppress leader of the villain team – 3 points]

[...]

Shin YuSung etched the long list of clauses into his brain.

For the Representative Selections, beating D Class was sufficient enough, but Shin YuSung did not know the meaning of the word ‘sufficient’.

Shin YuSung’s goal, unfortunately for D Class, was to lead F Class and seize absolute victory.

Chapter 30

The sound of birds chirping could be heard floating through the trees.

Shin YuSung was focusing his mind in the middle of the dense forest. Of course, the intent wasn't to train for the intramurals that were taking place the next day.

The thing that he was pursuing was something that he had been chasing after for a long time, since even before leaving the Martial Spirits' Mountain.

'To think that I still cannot utilize anything past the 3rd form of the Battle God Style.'

It had been four years since he had learned the 3rd form, the heaven-shattering fist, and Shin YuSung had still not achieved the 4th form. That being said, the Fist King had created the 3rd form of the Battle God Style during the time when he was an active hunter. Considering that Shin YuSung was still a student, his potential could truly be called limitless.

But Shin YuSung did not like the fact that he was currently stagnating.

'I want to go farther.'

The desire to become stronger was what drove Shin YuSung every day. It was understandable. One could use his life on the Martial Spirits' Mountain after being abandoned for being 'too weak' as proof.

Shin YuSung could not afford to stagnate.

For the Shin-Oh family, who had thrown him aside,

For the Fist King, who had believed in his potential,

And even for his own self.

Whoosh.

Shin YuSung coated both arms with mana, then closed his eyes in concentration. His body's senses opened up as he did so, and everything around him began to slow down.

Crinkle.

The sound of small animals stepping on fallen leaves.

Fwoo.

The pleasant breeze.

Shin YuSung could even feel the wavelength of the mana wrapped around his hands.

But as he shifted his position to use the skill, the mana in his hand dispersed into the air.

‘Another failure.’

Shin YuSung let out a big breath and turned his head to face behind him.

“What do you want?”

Shin YuSung was looking at what seemed to be a blank patch of air. But as he kept staring at it, the voice of a surprised male suddenly rang in the air.

“...To think that you would actually sense me?”

The colors around the trees warped and shifted into the shape of a man. This person was the only student in Gaon Academy to have an invisibility Trait.

The boy that Shin YuSung was staring at was an S Class student, called an elite by some. He was 4th in the student rankings, his name was Min SungHyuk.

Min SungHyuk looked at Shin YuSung as if fascinated, then held out an arm to offer it for a handshake.

“You don’t have some kind of radar installed in your body, right? This is the first time anyone’s noticed me at that distance!”

But Shin YuSung did not take Min SungHyuk’s hand, nor did he reply to him. He merely stared at the other boy’s eyes without a word. Min SungHyuk coolly smiled, a bit taken aback by Shin YuSung’s attitude towards him even when he tried to smooth things over.

“S-sorry. You just interested me since you were training even on our off day. I guess, if I had to be honest, I also wanted to test your skills. I guess that’s kind of rude? Anyways...”

Min SungHyuk laughed in a friendly manner. Suddenly, his demeanor changed.

“I do have another reason I came here. I have something I need to deliver to you.”

Min SungHyuk touched his Pocket, eyes slit. As he did so, a beam emitted from the Pocket and formed letters using holograms.

[Club Member Application Form]

[Club Name – Hunter Club]

[President – 2nd Year S Class Shin HaYoon]

“...Shin HaYoon.”

Shin YuSung’s face stiffened at the name. Min SungHyuk laughed with a triumphant look on his face.

“So you do know this name, huh? It’s no surprise that you’re shocked. Our president is from the famous Shin-Oh family, after all.”

Shin HaYoon was first in the student rankings among the second years and was slated to be the student council president next term. She was a powerful individual. Min SungHyuk seemed to think that Shin YuSung was going to accept the invitation.

“Isn’t this amazing? A person like that is personally recruiting you. There will never be a chance like this again. On top of that, the extracurriculars we do are guild-level.”

Min SungHyuk kept lauding praise over the club and Shin HaYoon. Of course, Shin YuSung was interested in her offer. Shin HaYoon was called a genius born with exceptional talent, even among the Shin-Oh family, which was known for its hunters.

When Shin YuSung had been sent to the orphanage at five, Shin HaYoon had been selected as the next successor for the Shin-Oh family at six.

Their Traits were what had put such a large chasm between both childrens’ fates. Shin HaYoon had been born with an S-rank Trait, and Shin YuSung had been born with an F-rank Trait; that one difference was what had led to the current circumstances between these two.

“Is that so?”

Shin YuSung looked at Min SungHyuk. He had been a little shaken when Shin HaYoon had been mentioned, but he had already regained his calm.

“What happens if I refuse?”

Min SungHyuk was puzzled at Shin YuSung’s reply.

“Naw, there’s no way you’re going to do that, right? This is the Shin-Oh family! Senior Shin HaYoon is trying to become the best hunter in the world, not to even mention South Korea!”

The other boy couldn't comprehend Shin YuSung's question. A student could receive many privileges if the student council president had a favorable impression of them. Because of this, the Hunter Club was famous for being a club that many adored, but only a few got to be a part of.

This meant that the Hunter Club, considering its position in the greatest academy in Korea, was where the chosen ones were gathered. And someone would refuse an invitation to it? This was an incomprehensible concept to Min SungHyuk.

"Hey, you gotta at least stay next to someone like that so you can pick up the scraps, right?"

Min SungHyuk laughed good-naturedly, but Shin YuSung's expression was cold. The other boy wasn't wrong. Being under Shin HaYoon's wing was definitely going to help in one's growth.

But Shin YuSung pressed the [Decline] button on the hologram.

Ping!

The hologram disappeared as soon as Shin YuSung made his choice. Min SungHyuk, in shock, opened his slit eyes and began to shout.

"You... what?!"

"Thanks, but I'll decline the offer."

Shin YuSung had already made his decision. It wasn't a bad idea to work under Shin HaYoon if he wanted to grow his strength a reasonable amount, but it wasn't something that would let him become the greatest hunter in the world. If he was taken under the wing of the Hunter Club's president, he couldn't form his own party.

'And that's not all... '

The stronger he got, the more Shin HaYoon would use him, throwing him around according to her own whims. Min SungHyuk grimaced at Shin YuSung's choice.

“Are you really... refusing senior Shin HaYoon’s offer?”

Shin HaYoon was a genius above all the students, but Shin YuSung had decided he didn’t care. If Shin HaYoon had the Shin-Oh family behind her, Shin YuSung had the Fist King behind him.

“Yeah.”

Shin YuSung’s goal, like Shin HaYoon, was also to be the greatest. To do so, he had to bear an equivalent amount of burden and responsibility to Shin HaYoon.

But Min SungHyuk began to mumble, bewildered by the other boy’s answer.

“...Weird. She was so certain that you would accept it.”

“What?”

“She said that you two have a close relationship together.”

That wasn’t wrong since they were both members of the same family, but that was twelve years ago.

“A close relationship...”

Shin YuSung couldn’t help it. He laughed. Shin HaYoon really was the lawful heir of the Shin-Oh family.

A meritocracy based on one’s skill that threw those who were useless in the garbage and had the gall to pull out the same garbage that they had thrown away in the first place if it suddenly became useful to them. Shin YuSung began speaking to Min SungHyuk once more with an expression that suggested that a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

“Tell this to my sister: I don’t even remember what you look like anymore.”

He was no longer Shin YuSung of the Shin-Oh family.

* * *

The Hunter Club: the greatest club of Gaon Academy.

Shin HaYoon slowly read through the documents on the desk. Many changes had taken place in the Hunter Club after she had taken charge of it, things that a mere club would usually never do.

[Request Location – Coral Cave]

[Request Type – Collecting By-Product]

[Request Payment – 22,000,000 won]

For one, the Hunter Club didn't need to rely on the extracurriculars for hunter requests, as they never stopped flowing in. That was, of course, all due to the networking that Shin HaYoon's family provided and her own innate resourcefulness.

There were countless corporations that wanted people from Gaon, Korea's greatest academy. Despite being a student, Shin HaYoon was acting as the 'guild leader' for the academy.

"Send students who are at least second years to the Coral Cave."

Rank 4 monsters lived in Coral Cave. As the barebones order fell from her lips, the student next to her nodded.

"Understood, President. This is the Shinsung group's request, right? How about we send the students who are somewhere around 10th and above in the student rankings?"

The club members seemed to defer to Shin HaYoon, even if they were in the same grade. It was as if she was in a class higher than them.

"Sounds good. I'll assign the people."

Shin HaYoon quickly stamped the document. The students in the Hutner Club were allowed to start their extracurriculars as soon as Shin HaYoon allowed them to, without a staff member's approval.

This was actually a huge boon to Gaon Academy. Through this, the club brought in an astronomical amount of money for the school and improved Gaon's image in the process.

First in the student rankings for the second-year students...

A family background in the Shin-Oh family, a clan that was famous for producing hunters...

And the president of the Hunter Club. With all of these prestigious titles, Shin HaYoon was all but guaranteed to be the student council president next year.

It was rather obvious why the other club members were trying to make a good impression on her.

‘Though...’

Shin HaYoon looked at the message from her Pocket and laughed.

[Club Member Application Form]

[Name – Shin YuSung]

[Answer – Decline]



Shin YuSung had refused her offer. This was the first time that this had happened to Shin HaYoona after she had become the president of the Hunter Club.

But she could understand why.

‘...it’s because of what happened 12 years ago, I bet.’

The Shin-Oh family had abandoned Shin YuSung. She, at first, could not understand why her parents had done this. But now, she understood. Only the few who were skilled above the rest were in charge of the world, and the Shin-Oh family was one of those families.

A hunter with an F-rank Trait was not needed in such a family.

‘That was why he was thrown away.’

She could agree with this logic, herself.

But the story now was different Shin YuSung had shown incredible prowess with his F-rank Trait, possibly due to his lineage. He had already been chosen for the Representative Selection and had the chance of going to the International Competition.

Shin YuSung now had the right to come back into the fold of the Shin-Oh family. The club invitation that Shin HaYoon had sent him was a form of acknowledgment of that fact, and also a gesture of goodwill.

‘The head of the household also approved of this.’

But Shin YuSung did not seem like he was willing to return to the Shin-Oh family. Shin HaYoon fell into deep thought. Shin YuSung was just too ripe of a fruit to not pick, considering the skills and growth that he had exhibited.

What had tipped the scales was the fact that he was the official disciple of the ‘Fist King’. Shin HaYoon gave a leisurely smile.

‘What to do... ’

Tap tap tap—

Shin HaYoon’s index finger tapped the surface of the desk in a

rhythmical manner. This was a habit that she exhibited when she was deep in thought.

Her finger only stopped after she had finished her calculations.

‘...Well, I can just watch him for now. I’m curious to see how much he’ll develop, after all.’

Shin HaYoon was not worried.

As long as Gaon Academy was the stage, she was its director.

Chapter 31

The pride of Seoul, the Shinsung Theme Park.

Despite its 1.5 million sq/m size*, the only people currently in it were students from Gaon Academy.

The Shinsung group had let the academy borrow the park for the first-years' intramurals.

“Wow, we’re doing our exam at a theme park!”

“I heard that the second-years all did their test on a deserted island last year...”

“Thank EunAh.”

The greatest chaebol in South Korea...

Kim SeukHan, the president of the Shinsung group.

Despite being labelled as someone with an iron will, the one person who made him into putty was his granddaughter, Kim EunAh. The reason why these first years had been allowed this extravagant testing location was due to her and her grandfather’s power.

“How much would it cost to stay at this theme park overnight?”

“...She’s on a totally different level.”

The students’ gazes and their murmurings eventually focused on Kim EunAh.

“There’s no need to make a fuss about something so minor,” she stated.

Something like this was nothing to her. The instructor, Lin Xiao, began to yell while looking at the students who were in the area.

“Hey, hey! You guys know where your lodgings are, right? Gather at the hotel in the water theme park area when it’s time.”

Even the place that the students were staying in was a world-class hotel. The instructor in charge of guiding the students, So HaeJung, tapped the mic to check for feedback, then gave out the instructions.

“Please check where your testing location is, as every class has a different one. Today, you will have some time to gather with your classmates in advance to make a plan. All you have to do for the test is to be at the testing location at 11 AM tomorrow.”

It was a day for rest.

The next day was reserved for the test.

As So HaeJung finished her speech, the students began to split up. The Shinsung Theme Park was the highest-rated amusement park in South Korea, yet there were few students attending Gaon Academy who were excited at the prospect of it, owing to the academy’s focus on strength above all.

Among them, the atmosphere of F Class was the most morose, as they had been labelled the weakest class until then. For them, Shin YuSung, a Seven, was the best chance that the class had ever gotten.

Because of this, the focus of the F Class students naturally focused on Shin YuSung.

“I can’t believe that F Class has a Seven. So reliable!”

“Hey, YuSung-ah! What about us?”

“Just tell us what we have to do for the test!”

“Me too! Me too!”

Shin YuSung was completely surrounded by his classmates.

Due to this, the crowd eventually pushed Sumire, who had been next to Shin YuSung, to the outside of the circle.

“Ah, uh, U... um! Me too!”

Unlike Sumire, who looked like she was about to burst into tears, Lee SiWoo took advantage of the situation to claim his position next to Shin YuSung and was acting like he was his right-hand man.

“Hey, hey! Just calm down for a moment! YuSung here will hand out all of the roles to you guys.”

Shin YuSung carefully read through a sheet of paper listing every student's Traits and skills. Then, he began to speak.

“We're in Zone A, right?”

“Yep, you're right! Zone A!” responded Lee SiWoo, almost right away.

Zone A, where D Class and F Class were taking their test, was where the Ferris Wheel and the safari area were located. The haunted house and the giant aquarium were located alongside them.

‘...If we want to keep the initiative against the villain team, we absolutely have to block off a few of the paths.’

The combat strength of the F Class students was, as evaluated by Shin YuSung, overall weaker than D Classes. Around 3 or 4 F Class members were needed to stop two D Class members.

However, each class only had 30 people. Putting the extra missions for individual points into consideration, even cloning himself wouldn't be enough to make up for the difference. Efficiency was the name of the game for these intramurals.

‘...I have to divide everyone up in the most efficient manner by taking their Traits into consideration.’

Shin YuSung quickly made some calculations in his head. Lee SiWoo, one of the few who could attack from a distance, would be sent to the Ferris Wheel. Meanwhile, Sumire, who had gotten fairly strong on her own and had an artifact to boot, was going to be in charge of a special mission.

‘And for the rest, I’ll divide them up into groups of threes that all have an equal level of skill between each group.’

Shin YuSung’s strategical mind and judgment, which he had inherited from the Fist King, were on par with hunters who were on active duty. He focused on the synergy between the F Class students’ Traits in order for their lacking skills to face off against D Class.

“First, SiWoo. Your group will be composed specifically of those who can make long-range attacks.” YuSung pointed to the Ferris Wheel. “Stop D Class from advancing from there.”

Lee SiWoo gave an enthusiastic nod at Shin YuSung’s instructions.

“Okay! Gotcha!”

Two students immediately went to Lee SiWoo’s side in a cooperative manner.

“Pick me! My mana bullet can travel over 300 meters!”

“My Trait is also good for long-range attacks! I promise I can do well!”

Shin YuSung nodded.

“We can’t control the Ferris Wheel, so you guys will have to climb the scaffolding to the top. If you guys attack from there, D Class will have a hard time even trying to retaliate.”

Shin YuSung seemed to be proficient at figuring out the best role for every student—due to being taught tactics from the Fist King himself. As he finished with the long-range group, he turned to Sumire.

“And, Sumire?”

The girl in question raised her hand at his call, even at a far distance.

“Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi! I’m over here!”

She could only approach Shin YuSung after the other students made way for her. He continued to give out commands in a calm manner.

“You’ll be next to me, but as soon as the exam starts, move according to the instructions I gave you. We won’t know where the special mission will be located until that moment, after all.”

The fact that Sumire had been given the task of fulfilling the special mission meant that Shin YuSung had acknowledged her as the strongest teammate.

“M-me!?”

But she was only shocked for a moment.

‘D-does that mean I’m the person in F Class that Shin YuSung-ssi trusts the most... ’

Sumire began to laugh in a creepy manner once more. It was only due to luck that she had been partnered with Shin YuSUNG during the Jewel Island test, but that was not the case for the intramurals.

He had solely chosen her for her ability to complete the special mission.

“Right! Please leave it to me!” she exclaimed, eyes twinkling—something that she hadn’t shown in a while. Even Lee SiWoo, who had been watching her, seemed to change his unfavorable impression of Sumire.

‘She looks less gloomy than before, somehow.

Her change in attitude was all due to Shin YuSung.

The class president of D Class, Park HaWon...

She was inspecting the testing zone with her right-hand man, Kang MinSu. As the leader, she had decided to perform a preliminary investigation of the area in order to create a plan.

The main problem was one of the attractions of the theme park, the haunted house.

The building, designed to look like an abandoned hospital, emanated a creepy atmosphere, even from the entrance. The green light spilling out of the pitch-black hallway brought up all sorts of terrors to one's mind.

"...Why is it so cold here? Did they turn the air conditioner on?"

Park HaWon made an excuse in an effort to hide how frightened she was about the place. On the flip side, Kang MinSu seemed calm, without a single change to his expression.

"Really? It feels the same to me. If you're so scared of it, why don't we check the map for the hospital instead?"

"Scared? Why would I be scared, when this is all just fake, anyways... ghosts don't even exist... what are we, children...?"

Even as she said this, Park HaWon was tightly gripping Kang MinSu's uniform dress shirt with one hand and fiddling with her glasses.

She exhibited clear signs of nervousness.

"Well, it's pretty dark around the area, which is good for hiding hostages. There're a lot of rooms, which are also good for planting ambushes, and..."

And on top of all that, Park HaWon had begun talking more than usual. Kang MinSu laughed at the sight.

"I see."

“Stop laughing and start thinking about how to win in the intramurals.”

Park HaWon kept muttering while looking around the area, even after telling him off.

“What is the headmaster thinking, letting people use artifacts during the test? This is completely skewed towards F Class. He’s totally on their side...”

Grumbling, Park HaWon crossed the halfway mark of the passageway. As she did so, a beam projector suddenly began to activate.

Vmmm!

A ghost hologram was projected on the wall of the hallway. It had a toothless smile that went up to the eyes, which showed nothing but the whites.

As a giant ghost’s face appeared in the greenlit hallway, Park HaWon froze like a deer in the headlights.

Kang MinSu looked at the statue that had once been his classmate.

“You said you weren’t scared. What are you doing?” he asked.

Park Ha Won stared down the empty hallways.

With a sob in her throat, she replied to him.

“I wanna go back to the hotel.”

The terror of the abandoned hospital had won against Park HaWon’s pride.

* * *

8 PM.

Shin YuSung and Sumire were heading back to the resort later than the other students, as they had taken more time to prepare for the special mission.

There was a brief moment of silence.

Shin YuSung looked at the lights strung up in various colors around the pool in the waterpark. Then, he began to speak.

“You’ve worked hard, Sumire.”

While not quite as strong as Shin YuSung, she had made incredible progress. Her skills were overwhelming compared to the other F Class members. Someone who had strong physical prowess like Shin YuSung had great synergy with her skeleton summoning Skill.

The skeleton that Sumire could summon with Shin YuSung’s hair was only three-tenths as strong as the original, but that was still an incredible help for the exam.

Sumire, however, shook her head at his praise.

“Um? N-no! Th-the one who worked hard was you, Shin YuSung-ssi! I just did what you told me to do...”

Sumire quickly spat out the words, voice eventually fading at the end. To someone who had constantly been last place, the fact that Shin YuSung had been her partner and that she had become one of the Sevens felt like a dream.

“...Actually, everyone in F Class is really thankful towards you, Shin YuSung-ssi.”

Sumire wanted to express her gratitude, even if it was embarrassing for her to talk about it so directly.

“Thankful?”

Shin YuSung gave Sumire a bemused look. To him, all that he had done up to this point was in pursuit of his goal to become the

strongest.

But Sumire and the other F Class students thought differently.

“Everyone in F Class... has an F-rank Trait. You already know this, but... hunters with F-rank Traits aren’t treated very well, right?”

It was true.

The number of famous hunters with F-rank Traits could be counted on one hand. The majority of hunters couldn’t even properly challenge the Tower and could only make a living with a full-time job through conquering dungeons. Sumire continued to speak with a bitter expression on her face.

“So... we’ve been ostracized a lot, and a bunch of us even gave up on becoming stronger.”

Sumire turned her gaze towards the pool.

Lots of thoughts came to her mind as she stared at the various lights strewn about the area. They were lit up in various colors and placed in unique configurations.

“But that isn’t the case anymore. We know now that it’s possible to be strong, even with an F-rank Trait...”

Sumire looked up at Shin YuSung and beamed.

“Because Shin YuSung-ssi taught all of us that.”



Sumire's smile was bright.

Shin YuSung had become the hope of both F Class and all F-rank

hunters. The trust that the Fist King had first placed in the abandoned Shin YuSung had been nurtured into hope in the boy's hands—and now, he was planting that same hope into the other F-rank hunters.

Shin YuSung had merely done all of this to get closer to his goal to become the strongest hunter, but the idea that his actions had motivated the others was not unwelcome to him.

In fact, it just felt like he had another reason to beat D Class in the exam.

* Around 70% the size of Disneyland Park in California, for comparison.

Chapter 32

10 PM, past curfew...

Kim EunAh, however, left her room and walked towards the 1st floor. So HaeJung, who had been guarding the lobby, saw her and grimaced.

“What on earth are you doing? You can’t leave after lights out—”

“I have permission, though.”

Kim EunAh cut off the older woman with an easy smile. So HaeJung was speechless at the girl’s confident attitude.

“What?”

“How many times do I have to say it? I have permission from the headmaster.”

“...From the headmaster?”

Beep!

The phone happened to ring at that time. So HaeJung checked the text with an incredulous expression on her face.

[Jin ByungCheol: Student EunAh said that she has an urgent matter to deal with, so just let her go. She has my permission, so definitely do not get on her nerves!]

The text was sent through their personal numbers instead of through the school’s messaging system as if he knew himself that this was an embarrassing situation to be in.

“...I told him to tell you earlier,” Kim EunAh grumbled under her

breath.

She looked back at So HaeJung with a smile.

“Then I can leave, right?”

So HaeJung let out a laugh, exasperated at the girl’s demeanor.

“...Ha.”

The reason that they could hold a school exam at a giant theme park was all due to the Shinsung group’s support, and Gaon Academy itself received a lot of funding from it as well. It was no wonder that Jin ByungCheol had agreed to this.

However, So HaeJung deeply disliked Kim MinAh’s attitude.

“Yeah. You have the headmaster’s permission, so go ahead since that’s the rule. But...”

So HaeJung continued with a frosty lilt to her voice.

“You really should mind your manners.”

Instead of being scared, however, Kim EunAh gave a carefree reply.

“I don’t need manners. I have a lot of money, after all.”

Ki EunAh made her way to the lobby without a second look. As she did so, a tall and handsome bodyguard opened the doors to the hotel lobby.

“Ma’am. Your limousine is ready.”

The bodyguard in his mid-20s gave her a ninety-degree bow in place of a greeting. Kim EunAh cocked her head as if displeased with something.

“Oh, right. It’s a little embarrassing walking around with you, so take

off your sunglasses during the night.”

The bodyguard and Kim EunAh both left with those parting words. The instructor in charge, So HaeJung, rubbed her forehead and let out a sigh.

“That rude little...”

* * *

Busan. Metro Hospital...

Kim EunAh placed the bodyguard who was following her in the hallway and gave him strict instructions.

“Hey, don’t come in here no matter what.”

Kim EunAh scrunched up her expression, trying to scare the other party. No one had ever forced their way into the hospital room so far, yet she insisted on doing this every time.

“Yes.”

The bodyguard responded, already used to it. Kim EunAh tapped her keycard on the door.

Vween!

The thick doors automatically opened, revealing a room around 1800 square feet wide. The furnishings were extravagant, like a hotel, but the atmosphere was frigid.

Kim EunAh gave a bittersweet smile at the sight of the room before her. She turned on the orange lights with familiar motions and watered the flowerpot on the windowsill.

She performed every action in the hospital room with practiced ease.

That was understandable. That day marked two whole years since she

had started visiting the hospital—it was not a short amount of time.

Kim EunAh approached the windowsill.

More precisely, she approached the bed in the room.

There was an unconscious man lying in it.

Kim EunAh sat on a chair and began to speak calmly.

“I’m here.”

The man did not respond. He was a first-priority patient whose breathing could stop without the machine connected to him helping his blood circulation.

Kim EunAh, familiar with the situation, calmly kept talking.

“Actually, tomorrow’s exam is going to be held in Busan.”

It had happened ten years prior.

Her brother, Kim JunHyuk, had been 11 years old; Kim EunAh had been seven, herself. She dug up those aged memories and serenely began to recount them.

“...I really thought I was going to die back then when we were playing in the water. ”

Even those old memories seemed like they had just happened yesterday to Kim EunAh.

[Even the shallow end scared you. You really were in trouble just now.]

[Sniff! Waah! I didn’t know... *sniff!* That it was, *sniff!* This... deep!]

[Of course, a swimming pool is going to be deep for a seven-year-old. And you lived, right? So why are you crying? You’re only supposed to

cry when you're dead.]

Those were some truly idiotic words of comfort.

Kim EunAh smiled unconsciously as she remembered what had happened ten years ago.



She had followed her brother Kim JunHyuk's words. Now, she was someone who didn't cry anymore.

‘...Why.’

Kim EunAh had asked herself that very question since it had happened two years ago. Why had her brother taken dangerous supplements?

It was a question that she would not have an answer to until Kim JunHyuk woke up. She could only do one thing:

Protect the position of the successor of the Shinsung group.

Kim EunAh had to become stronger than anyone else in order to fend off the hyenas who would strike if they saw her as vulnerable.

In order to calmly tell her brother, who would eventually wake up one day, that she had endured everything, she had to protect her heart with armor tougher than anyone else.

“...Then I’ll be off now.”

Vmm.

As the clock struck 11, her phone vibrated. Kim EunAh turned towards the door, then began to speak.

“...Hurry up and come back after you’ve had your rest. I’m only protecting your spot until then.”

Her nose was starting to burn for no reason. It wasn’t anything odd. No matter how strong someone was, they couldn’t always be so. Even if one momentarily felt sadness, they just had to pick themselves back up again.

She closed her eyes and took in a short, deep breath.

Vween.

Kim EunAh left the hospital room with a composed heart. She spoke coldly to the bodyguard looking down at her.

“...I’m tired. Let’s go back, already.”

The Kim EunAh who left the hospital room was the same as she always had been.

* * *

A location where various large attractions were lined up...

F Class and D Class were being sorted near the merry-go-round.

30 F Class students.

30 D Class students.

So HaeJung double-checked the number of students on either side, then began to speak.

“I will explain the rules again before the start of the exam.”

She touched the empty air in front of her.

Woosh.

[First-Year Intramural Rules]

- 1. If the standard barrier on you shatters, you are disqualified from the rest of the exam and must move to the waiting room.**
- 2. Additional points will be given if a group leader is taken out.**
- 3. Students with severe injuries will be transported away for proper treatment.**
- 4. Only two artifacts and/or hunter gears can be used for each class.**

Holograms appeared above each students’ Pockets. After reading the

rules, the D Class president, Park HaWon, looked at Shin YuSung, who was standing in front of her, and began to murmur.

“Artifacts are limited to 2...”

It was the greatest variable in the test.

Even one artifact could change the flow of a battle, but F Class had two of them. Of course, Park HaWon had her own hunter gear ready in her Pocket, but it wasn't comparable to F Class's artifacts.

So HaeJung began to speak again once all of the students had finished checking the rules.

“And these are the win conditions for the villain team.”

The win conditions for the villain team (D Class) are the following:

- 1. Take over the hunter team's base.**
- 2. Hold the hostage for 1 hour.**
- 3. Suppress the hunter team's leader.**

Another hologram appeared over everyone's Pockets. Park HaWon began to think.

‘The first one... it might be possible if Shin YuSung leaves the base.’

1 and 2... If one briefly summarized these two winning conditions for D Class, 1 would be offense, and 2 would be defence.

Stealing F Class's base was easy. The problem was Shin YuSung's existence.

‘We have to either steal the base while Shin YuSung isn't there or protect our hostage.’

She kept mulling it over.

The answer was simple, as the only person who needed to be kept in check was Shin YuSung himself.

“We’ll divide ourselves in half as we previously planned.”

Park HaWon told the attacking group to hide and wait. The plan was to conquer the F Class base when Shin YuSung came over to try and rescue the hostage.

And if he decided not to leave the base, D Class would win by keeping the hostage with them for one hour.

“Don’t even try attempting number three... He’s a complete monster.”

Park HaWon finished her briefing.

Kang MinSu, her right-hand man, issued a warning in a soft tone of voice.

“We won’t forgive anyone going off and doing stuff by themselves. Don’t attack Shin YuSung on your own, no matter what.”

Shin YuSung was lording over D Class as terror incarnate. It was understandable, given his exploits.

So HaeJung continued to speak after D Class finished checking their win conditions.

“Next are the hunter team’s win conditions.”

The win conditions for the hunter team (F Class) are the following:

- 1. Defend the hunter team’s base.**
- 2. Rescue the hostage and protect them for 1 hour.**

3. Suppress the villain team's leader.

Shin YuSung checked the hologram, then looked at Sumire. F Class had already made plans for their victory.

F Class had an ace up its sleeve that D Class could never even begin to imagine.

Sumire energetically nodded her head as the boy glanced over at her.

“Leave it to me!”

It was obvious that D Class would invest all resources into stopping Shin YuSung, the newcomer of F Class and a Seven.

But that was not the case for Sumire.

Even if she had become a Seven after the Jewel Island test, D Class and the other students thought that she was merely lucky and that Shin YuSung was the only strong one.

This wasn't surprising, considering that Sumire had been weak enough to constantly be in last place, even in F Class.

However, it was a different matter when she had Shin YuSung's hair.

A skeleton who was around 30% as strong as Shin YuSung could turn the tide. And the necromancer, Sumire, had gotten an artifact that strengthened the undead at the graveyard dungeon.

Despite having an F-rank Trait, she had found a way to use it to its maximum potential.

“Okay, I'll leave it to you.” Shin YuSung replied with a gentle tone. Sumire's ears slowly grew red.

‘Shin YuSung-ssi... believes in me?’

She lowered her head as her mouth began to twitch. The cackling

Sumire's enthusiasm was several times stronger than usual.

"Everyone's ready, right?" asked Shin YuSung, the leader. As he did so, the F Class students answered loudly in unison.

"Yes!"

It was a form of courtesy that they showed to their leader, who had done his utmost in a short amount of time. So HaeJung stared at the sight.

'...F Class, known for their listlessness, is showing an incredible sense of unity?'

Shin YuSung had pulled up his classmates from the pits of despair with his charisma.

'So being strong isn't the end of it... He even has the disposition to be the leader of a group.'

So HaeJung liked Shin YuSung.

Even if she didn't know him very well, she knew that there was a reason as to why people followed him.

'That child has something that attracts the other students towards him.'

Her interest in the test was piqued; even though she had initially not had huge hopes for F Class's results, she had decided to watch Shin YuSung's prowess.

"The students who complete special missions will be given individual points as a bonus, according to the instructor's judgement. Now..."

So HaeJung lifted her arm to show the students that the test had begun.

"We will begin the intramurals exam."

Ring!

[600 seconds]

[599 seconds]

A 10-minute countdown appeared on the holograms from the students' Pockets—it was counting down the 10 minutes of brief peace for them.

The intramural match was Shin YuSung's first team match.

‘...The International Competition is also a team match.’

There was no better stage in which to test his own mettle.

Chapter 33

The building housing the rest area in the theme park...

The F Class members, aside from the group that had entered the building, were neatly lined up in a row; in the middle of the line was 3rd in the student rankings, Shin YuSung.

‘I still have to wait for my chance.’

Shin YuSung sat on a chair placed in the wide-open lobby.

Unlike the hunter team, who had to first score points or suppress the opponents, the villain team could win just by taking over the base. If the base was conquered during the time that Shin Yusung left it to save the hostage or capture the leader, the test would end.

Shin YuSung chose to stay on the defensive until the time came.

As long as he and the defense division were in the rest area, it was impossible for D Class to take over their base.

Shin YuSung used his pocket to intermittently give orders to his classmates.

“Long-range group, report back with updates on what you see the opposing team doing.”

–Got it! Just leave it to me, YuSung-ah! Lee SiWoo replied enthusiastically to Shin YuSung’s command.

Lee SiWoo, who currently wielded a bow, was a master of ranged weapons.

To him, the immense height of the Ferris wheel was a great weapon. On top of that, his Clairvoyance Skill created a wide field of vision.

Due to this, their understanding of the situation was higher than the other team's.

Shin YuSung took stock of the battlefield.

‘The long-range group has complete control of the area around the Ferris wheel.’

The problem lay in dividing up the opponents. The current situation was that if Shin YuSung wasn't with the defense division, even 10 D Class students could pose a threat to the base.

‘3 F Class members can just barely fight against 2 D Class members.;

This was, of course, because F Class's average strength was lower than D Class's.

‘We need to use our numbers more efficiently than the other team's to win in these intramurals.

Shin YuSung checked the location of the hostage with his Pocket.

[Special Mission]

[Description: The hunter team must rescue the hostage from the villain team.]

[Location: House of Horrors]

[Time remaining: 60 minutes]

The hostage that D Class was in charge of actually held a very threatening role towards F Class. It stopped Shin YuSung from making any rash moves, and if F class stayed put, 60 minutes would pass, and D Class would achieve victory.

‘But we have our own ace up our sleeve.’

Shin YuSung activated his Pocket with a smile on his face.

“Sumire. The hostage is located in the House of Horrors.”

–O-okay! I understand!

Before taking the Jewel Island test, she was known as the weakest student of her entire grade, but now she had become one of the Sevens proper. Even so, people rated her incredibly lowly.

‘Surprisingly, no one from D Class is keeping Sumire in check.’

Sumire could act on her own without particular interference from the enemy. D Class was currently devoting all of their efforts into stopping Shin YuSung, who was lying in wait at the rest stop.

Due to this, Sumire, who was heading towards the House of Horrors, was neglected in favor of him.

‘It’s a good thing.’

D Class was overlooking both the synergy between Sumire and Shin YuSung’s hair and also her newly obtained artifact.’

‘Since it’ll be too late by the time they figure it out.’

Shin YuSung rose up from his seat and scanned the area. The F Class students were showing fervor the likes of which they had never had before.

Shin YuSung picked out one of the students from among them.

“Renia?”

“Uh, yeah?!”

Renia, who had been standing around with a blank expression on her face, flinched as he suddenly called for her.

“You have a Trait related to fire, right?”

“Oh, y-yeah! You really remembered it! Even when it’s an F-rank Trait with a lot of drawbacks...”

Renia seemed happy at the thought that Shin YuSung had remembered her Trait. With it, she could burn any object that she was touching—it could not make fire out of nothing.

It was rather impractical to use in combat, but Shin YuSung immediately found a way to use it.

“The area around the rest stop is made up of a lot of bushes, right?”

“Pretty sure? It’s a park, so...”

The park next to the rest stop was riddled with large shrubs. It was a vibrant, well-maintained piece of forest land.

Shin YuSung pointed at the park and laughed.

“Burn it all down.”

A pause.

“Huh? The... entire park?” Renia asked, stupefied.

“You can do it, right?”

“I can! I can, but...”

Renia became flustered at the sudden suggestion. One of the male students next to her narrowed his eyes.

“Renia! Are you really going against the orders of Leader-nim?!” he yelled.

Renia’s wide eyes became even wider in shock.

“Nooo... it’s just that, if I burn something, it’s arson! That’s a crime!”

Shin YuSung shook his head at her words. He then took one step closer to the girl.

“The instructors told us to treat the test like it’s real, right?”

Treat it like real life.

Gaon Academy’s instructors told this to their students until it had practically become a habit of speech. Shin YuSung’s master, the Fist King, had been the same.

[My training will always consist of practical experience. YuSung-ah! Devote yourself to your training with this in mind: failure is death!]

The Fist King was a crackpot who had made a 9-year old Shin YuSung defeat a rank 2 monster. Shin YuSung, as his disciple, was the same. In the face of real-life experience, he did not know the meaning of the phrase ‘holding back’.

“Uh, mhm...”

Renia took a step back, intimidated. Shin YuSung took another step towards her in response.

“In that case, would you consider the hunters setting a fire in an effort to secure the area from the attacks of villains to be committing arson?”

“N-no...”

“Renia. There’s no such thing as holding back in real life. You have to do everything in your power to win.”

Shin YuSung told her all of this with a sincere expression on his face. Renia stared at it in a daze and nodded at his words.

“...You’re right. The test is like real life... We shouldn’t hold back...” she mumbled as if bewitched.



“You can do it, right?”

“Okay! I will!”

Committing arson for a test was much more drastic than what one would call ‘doing your best’. But no one made a move to oppose Shin YuSung’s wild-eyed lunacy.

“Hey, get a move-on! Leader-nim is saying we need to set a fire!”

“Bring stuff we can burn. Renia needs something to use as a catalyst!”

“We have someone who uses wind here, right? Blow the smoke around after the park starts burning.”

Instead, the students of F Class took the initiative and began to set fire to the park in the name of victory.

By Shin YuSung’s command, a campfire of unprecedented size began to form in the theme park.

* * *

The pitch-black House of Horrors.

Park HaWon, who was staring at her Pocket, was mumbling. Her face was pale.

“Wh-what is that?”

The Pocket was showing a video of the park around the rest stop building going up in flames.

“Who the hell sets a fire in the middle of a test?!”

She ended up screaming at Shin YuSung’s eccentricity. A deafening amount of messages were pouring out of her Pocket.

–You told us to hide in the forest! It’s on fire right now, you know?!

–Prez, what do we do? The ambush division doesn’t have anywhere to hide in right now!

–One of the ambush division members got hit by the opponent’s long-range division!

Park HaWon grimaced and began to spit out orders rapid-fire.

“...Shin YuSung, why on earth did he command his people to do this?” she asked herself, trying to squeeze the answer out of her head.

Lin Xiao, who was playing the role of the hostage, proudly smiled next to her.

“Student Shin YuSung really is smart. We purposefully chose the rest stop as the base because it was easy to ambush, but to think that he decided to burn the park down.”

“Even so, he’s insane for doing this just to catch our ambush division, isn’t he? This is only a test!”

Park HaWon scowled and adjusted her glasses. Lin Xiao shook his head.

“Your name is HaWon, right? This is what I, Lin Xiao, think.”

He looked at the student, then suddenly began to talk passionately.

“If you practice what you would do in a real situation when it’s already a real situation, it’s too late! If you don’t take drastic measures during a test, will you actually be able to take those measures when it matters?”

“Th-that’s...”

Park HaWon stuttered, shocked. Lin Xiao’s voice grew louder.

“You won’t! You will invariably make a mistake when it matters if you do not practice what you will do beforehand! Will the citizens forgive a hunter if they make a mistake in a real-life situation?”

“N-no, I mean...”

“What if a civilian loses their life due to a mistake when you could have saved them?”

“That’s...”

Park HaWon’s voice grew quieter. Kang MinSu, who was next to her, began to speak in favor of his instructor.

“Instructor Lin Xiao is right. The Shinsung group offered this location to us, so Shin YuSung is just taking as much advantage of it as he can.”

“No, that’s not what I wanted to...”

Her mind had become completely blank.

–Prez, are you listening to us?

–They set a fire! What do we do?

–We’re retreating, okay?

On top of that, the ambush division was sending an endless stream of messages to her. Park HaWon could only take a step back in the face of a situation that she had never foreseen coming.

“...Ambush division. All of you, retreat. Get out of the park, and just make sure to keep track of Shin YuSung’s location.”

Park HaWon’s pride was hurt at the fact that he had countered her strategy. However, there was nothing to be done about it. If she stubbornly clung to her initial plan, an even bigger mistake could occur.

‘Shin YuSung... ’

Even so, Park HaWon’s eyes were burning with the desire to win.

Chapter 34

Following Shin YuSung's directions, Sumire stealthily infiltrated the House of Horrors.

‘...I have to be as quiet as possible!’

Sneak sneak.

The first floor had a lot of points of entry, so there weren't a lot of students standing guard in it. Even so, Sumire moved quietly.

The building was modeled after an abandoned hospital—which were popular horror spots. An eerie green light poured out from the hallway.

Sumire held down her terror and moved to hide in a corner. It was a miracle that no one from D Class had discovered her yet.

As soon as she hid, she began to hear the voices of other students from the hallway.

“Hey, why is Park HaWon making us patrol this area when no one's here, anyways? Jerk.”

“Nothing we can do; the class prez told us to do it. Stop whining.”

Stomp stomp.

Sumire let out her held breath as the footsteps of the other students grew more distant.

“F-fuah...”

Now that she had found the patrol group, there was no reason for her

to stay hidden anymore. Sumire carefully took out a tissue from her pocket.

There was a hair gently swaddled in it.

‘Shin YuSung-ssi’s hair... ’

Sumire looked at the lock of hair as if it was a treasure, then used her Skill to summon a skeleton with it.

Crk! Craaack!

The floor of the abandoned hospital split and a grotesque skeleton crawled out from the crack in the floor. Its height was around the same height as Shin YuSung, possibly due to it being born from his hair.

“S-skeleton. Please stay silent... you have to find an opening, then strike. Do you understand?”

Sumire, reminded of when the skeleton started rampaging on its own on Jewel Island, immediately began to ask this of the skeleton. As if understanding her commands, it stood in place and shut its jawbones.

Clack! Clacklack!

‘...I can’t mess up the mission that Shin YuSung-ssi entrusted to me!’

Sumire braced herself and then used her Skill again. This time, a glowing, purple magic circle etched itself on the ground, and two bats appeared from it. This was the [Familiar] Skill that could summon low-level spirit familiars.

The most that they could usually do was perform reconnaissance or perform basic tasks, but this time, these bats had an important mission to fulfill.

“Yep, there sure was nothing there.”

“How about we go to where Jin MinAh is?”

As the two male students’ voices approached closer, Sumire gave a command to the bats with a gesture from her hand. The two bats hid in the darkness of the ceiling, where the light couldn’t reach.

“Jin MinAh? Why not.”

“Ugh, did you see the orders the other guys got from Park HaWon? We should’ve stayed in line, too.”

The moment of truth.

The bats on the ceiling viciously attacked the two unaware students.

Flap flap!

“Squeak! Squeeeeak!!”

The bats suddenly dove into their faces, cutting off their vision. The two students, shocked, began to scream.

“Aaaaah!! Bats!”

“What-aargh! Is this!?”

But the real attack had not even begun.

As soon as the boys were distracted by the bats, Sumire pointed at them with her finger.

“Skeleton, get them!”

At her orders, the Shin YuSung skeleton immediately pounced towards them.

Tup!

It kicked one of the students in the back at an incredible speed.

Bam! Shatter!

The square hit on the student's back instantly shattered his barrier shield. The D Class student toppled to the ground ungracefully.

“Arghhh!”

“A-a sneak attack!?”

The boy next to him tried to retaliate, but the skeleton easily dodged the swipe of his blade and threw a punch.

In an instant, the two were down for the count.

“W-we did it!”

Sumire began to jump for joy at her own exploits, then high-fived the skeleton.

“Cl-clack!”

Shin YuSung's skeleton also praised Sumire. It seemed that—due to the artifact raising the aptitude of her Skills—Sumire's dominion over her summoned creatures had risen.

“You, uu-uuu... this time... you're actually listening to me. Does that mean you've acknowledged me as your master?”

Sumire was touched by the skeleton's change in personality. The skeleton turned towards Sumire and rattled its jawbone in reply.

“Cl-clack!”

“R-really?”

“Clack, clackk!”

“This is... this first time that a skeleton has ever said this to me.
They’ve never listened to my orders before...”



It seemed like Sumire had some sort of way to communicate with the undead skeleton, possibly due to her Trait. Even if others couldn't understand what the skeleton was trying to communicate, its owner, Sumire, seemed very happy about it.

“Then let's check if these guys are actually de... n-no... if they're actually disqualified. Just in case.”

Sumire crouched down to check the remaining shield amount of the D Class students.

[D Class – Jin MyungSeok]

[Shield Remaining 0/1000]

[Status: Disqualified]

They were both out of the test.

Whatever shield they had remaining had been completely demolished. It was nothing to be surprised about. Even if the skeleton had only 3/10s of Shin YuSung's strength, it still used his martial arts techniques.

It had more than proven its destructive capabilities.

“Good job, skeleton! You really are from Shin YuSung-ssi's hair! You're the best!”

Sumire was on cloud nine because the plan had succeeded, but she wasn't in the position to relax, not until she had rescued the hostage.

‘Now, with the ring that Shin YuSung-ssi gave me... ’

Sumire looked at the ring and gave a creepy smile. She began to pour mana into the ring, so as to plunge the abandoned hospital into terror.

Woosh!

A black light began to emit from the ring.

What Sumire had used was the [Keeper of the Undead] Skill from the ring.

Unlike the [Familiar] Skill from earlier, a black magic circle was etched on the ground instead.

Voom!

A skeletal knight wearing a suit of armor appeared on top of the magic circle.

“...I will do what my M-Master wishes.”

Sumire used her Pocket to bring up a holograph listing the explanation of her artifact.

〈Immortal's Ring〉 Rare

Info – The ring owned by the ruler of the Graveyard of Despair, the lich. It has a power that boosts the power of the undead.

Keeper of the Dead (Skill) –

Summons undead monsters based on the amount of mana used by the caster.

Fog of Despair (Skill) –

Dark clouds move to hide the sun. They strengthen the undead underneath their shade.

In the explanation, there was no mention as to what sort of undead creature would be summoned by [Keeper of the Dead].

Sumire only realized why as she looked up at the death knight.

‘...O-oh, I see. The type of undead that's summoned is random.’

Even after using the Skill, Sumire was overflowing with mana. In disbelief, Sumire once again poured mana into the ring.

Voom!

Again, a magic circle was drawn on the ground. This time, a skeletal horse appeared from it.

“W-wow.”

Three minutes passed like this.

After using the ring a bunch of times, Sumire was surrounded by many different undead.

“Cl-clack!”

“Krr, neiiigh!”

“As... mas... ter... wi... shes...”

The skeleton soldiers clattered their jawbones.

The skeletal horses went up on their hind legs and neighed.

The death knight sat upon a skeletal horse. Sumire had turned the abandoned hospital building into an undead-themed dungeon.

She boldly took the lead.

“Th-then, let’s go, shall we?!”

With the power of the artifact, the weakest person of F Class, Sumire, was reborn into a terrifying necromancer.

* * *

The rooftop of the abandoned hospital...

Park HaWon, who had been looking down at the rest stop building, fiddled with her glasses and began to talk to Kang MinSu.

“Hey, Kang MinSu.”

“Yeah.”

“What is that Shin YuSung thinking? Why isn’t he leaving the rest stop?”

“Who knows? I’m curious, too. Even when time is on our side.”

As he said this, he threw a glance towards the instructor, Lin Xiao. As long as he, the hostage, was safely contained in their base, all they had to do was hold out for an hour for it to be D Class’s victory.

“Something’s off...”

Park HaWon narrowed her eyes. Suddenly, one of the students that she had placed on patrol hurriedly ran into the base.

Bam!

“H-HaWon-ah! Big trouble!”

“What’s going on?”

“The guys on the first floor! The ones who were on guard duty... they’re knocked out...”

“What!?” she yelled, face in a grimace.

Lin Xiao, who had been watching everything from the side, let out a small laugh.

“So it’s a diversion tactic, then.”

Park HaWon bit her lip, then shot a glance at Kang MinSu, who seemed to understand her plan from just that look.

“Okay. Got it, let’s split up for now.”

Now that they knew that there was an intruder in the abandoned hospital, Park HaWon had to leave the base to quickly neutralize the threat.

“No matter what happens, protect the hostage. I’ll go and attack the opponent’s base with our troops on the outside.”

“Hm... Ju HaJin is on the outside, right? He isn’t too shabby.”

After their discussion, Park HaWon quickly left the rooftop. Instructor Lin Xiao, despite the rope tied around him, managed to speak in a grave tone.

“Looks like D Class has been making a lot of errors so far.”

“That isn’t something that’s been decided yet.”

At Kang MinSu’s denial, Lin Xiao laughed, eyes closed.

“Is that so?”

“Shin YuSung still has to protect his base, and I can stop whoever the guerrilla member is. There is no change to the plan.”

But Lin Xiao kept throwing questions in response to Kang MinSu’s nonchalant reply.

“You don’t even know who infiltrated the building. How can you be so sure that you can stop them?”

His nonchalance lasted only a moment.

Kang MinSu couldn’t think of what to say to the instructor’s razor-sharp question.

“That’s...”

The reason why he was so certain of his victory was because he thought that the fighting skills of all F Class students, barring Shin YuSung, were poor.

‘...But I can’t say that to Instructor Lin Xiao.’

The man gazed coldly at the boy, who had suddenly become quiet.

“Didn’t I just tell you to treat this test as if it was real life? But you already think you’ve won when you barely know anything about the opponent, huh?”

Kang MinSu had lost to Lin Xiao. He eventually clenched his fist and began to speak again.

“Then I’ll prove that there is a gap between D Class and F Class with my skill.”

As if telling the instructor to listen in, Kang MinSu started to give plans to Sung IkHyun and Jin MinAh, who were next to him.

“Protect the hostage. I’ll go, defeat the intruder, then come back.”

This was the perfect chance for F Class, yet also their moment of danger.

The ace of D Class, Kang MinSu, was personally making his move in order to subdue Sumire.

Chapter 35

The dressing room in the abandoned hospital of horror...

The room was bathed in an eerie green light, further accentuating the shadows. Sumire was a terrifying complement to the sight.

“Hhhaa...”

It was filled to the brim with props and costumes that were scary enough that the theme park could boast about it. While Sumire would also have been terrified herself, at this moment, an idea came to her head as she looked through the terrifying props.

‘...With these items!’

After digging through the mound of costumes, Sumire took a mask from one of the boxes—it was a zombie mask that was covered in bulging veins and patches of stringy hair.

“Clack? Clacklack?”

Shin YuSung’s skeleton looked at Sumire and tilted its head in confusion. As it did so, Sumire placed the mask on the skeleton.

“Cla-clack, clack?”

“Wow...”

With the mask on, the skeleton looked like a monstrosity incarnate. Its skeletal body and now zombified face made Shin YuSung’s skeleton look much more terrifying than any of the usual ghosts that the theme park showed off in the House of Horrors.

Clatter. Clatter.

The death knight approached Sumire while she was dressing up the skeleton, rattling its own bones.

“My... mas... ter, if I can... help you with anything... please give... the order...”

The death knight knelt down on one knee in respect. As it did so, Sumire looked around the room, then exclaimed, “ah!” when she saw one of the props.

“Th-then! Mr. Death Knight, you don’t have a head, so... I-I’m sorry... can you hold this with you, then?”

What Sumire had handed over to the death knight was a mannequin head.

It was designed to look like a ghost with long hair and blood flowing out of its eyes. It truly completed the look of the death knight when it held the head in its left hand.

The props in the dressing room also managed to add an extra bit of flair to the other undead.

Proud of her work, Sumire wiped the sweat on her brow. Surrounding her were creatures of unimaginable terror.

Clopclopclopclop!

Several D Class students looked around, bemused, as they heard the sound of the skeletal horse’s hooves beating on the floor.

“Hm? What’s that sound?”

“Huh, huhh!?”

By the time they had figured out what the source of the noise was, it was already too late.

“Clack, clacklack!”

“Defeat... the enemy! For Master’s... honor!”

A swarm of costumed undead descended upon D Class, with the skeletons and death knights leading the charge. The abandoned hospital, once peaceful, became the site of unmitigated chaos.

“Wh-what are those!?”

“Kyaaa! What the hell are those...?! They’re ghosts, right! Ghosts!?”

“Stop pushing!”

The students, completely terrified, began to run away, shoving each other aside in their haste; a few of them even sank to the floor.

“Those are all undead, right? Why are there monsters in the theme park?! Why?!”

“I-is this also part of the test?”

“Just stop them already!”

After gathering their bearings, the D Class students began to goet back into formation and tried to fight off the wave of undead monsters, but this only worked for a moment.

This was because the real disaster had not yet descended upon the abandoned hospital. That disaster was currently fidgiting and walking out of the mass of undead.

“Uh, uuu...”

Sumire looked around the hospital, which had turned into something like a scene out of hell. Squirming purple mana began to emit from her as she held the ring in her hands and began to chant.

“D-darkness... conceal the sun.”

The real disaster.

With the power of the artifact, necromancers began to appear in the abandoned hospital. Even if there was no sunlight, as they were inside the building, black clouds were steadily streaming out from the ring.

Whoosh!

The undead that were under the black clouds began to reawaken with new strength.

“Neigh! Cr! Eak!”

The skeletal horses raised their heads into the air.

“Clack! Clack!”

The skeletons began to rattle their bones.

“This is the power... that our master has... bestowed upon us! Our thirst for blood grows!” yelled the death knight, red light spewing from its eyes.

The powered-up undead army began to push back the D Class students. They began screaming in fear.



“Kya! T-try to stop them!”

“They suddenly got a lot stronger!”

“I-I quit! I’m getting outta here!”

Sumire was leisurely reigning over the undead in the middle of the pandemonium. With protection from her subjects, she began to conquer the entire building.

But even with this overwhelming power in her hands, her attitude was still incredibly passive. She slowly peeked her head out from behind Shin YuSung’s skeleton.

“M-my undead... are winning...”

Even though Sumire’s Trait was classified as F-rank due to it being limited to undead monsters, she had been born with immense mana potential.

That talent was the biggest reason for why she could transfer over to Gaon Academy, a school where elite students gathered. She had fallen down to last place in the student rankings due to the fact that she had not been able to make a friend from whom she could borrow hair, but that was not the case anymore.

With Shin YuSung’s hair and the Immortal’s Ring, Sumire could take command of an undead army.

The advent of a real necromancer had come upon the House of Horrors.

Sumire daintily folded her hands and began to bite her lips as if she couldn’t hold herself back.

‘S-Shin YuSung-ssi will... definitely like this, right?’

Even when she tried not to, the corners of her lips were quirked up.

“Hee, fufu... heehee...”

Sumire began laughing in a terrifying manner.

One of the D Class students who was knocked down on the floor looked at Sumire and began to shake their head in terror.

“Sh-she’s a witch...”

* * *

Shin YuSung was trying to bring his specialty, his concentration, into focus. His palms were on the floor.

Boom. Booom. Stomp.

The more heightened his concentration was, the clearer he could feel things from his fingertips. What were, in the beginning, nothing but some dull vibrations began to faintly feel like footsteps trampling around the area.

‘It looks like the D Class students lying in wait are now moving towards Sumire’s direction.’

Sumire’s incredible prowess had made D Class focus on the defensive —her guerilla plan was a success.

“Now, it’s time for the long-range group to come back.”

Shin YuSung gave out the plan to the students next to him, who in turn nodded their heads. Of course, the ever-curious Renia carefully began to ask a question.

“Oh, um~ are we giving over the neutral grounds to D Class, then?”

“That area of the theme park is useless now. Since the number of people who are in their appointed places has decreased, only a few of them will cross neutral grounds to reach us.”

Renia decided to just nod at his words. No one in F Class knew just how Shin YuSung could tell where D Class’s troops were, but they decided to just trust him.

It was nothing to be surprised about, considering the fact that he was the savior of F Class who could lead them into victory over D Class.

“O-okay! We’ll believe you!”

“Tell us to do anything; we’ll do it!”

“Trust in YuSung only!”

The F Class members began to look at each other with passion lit in their eyes. Shin YuSung smiled and used his Pocket to contact Lee SiWoo.

“SiWoo. Bring everyone from the long-range group back here.”

– Huh? Okay! Gotcha!

Shin YuSung immediately ended the call with Lee SiWoo’s energized reply. He couldn’t afford to waste time on trivial things. The precious few moments that Sumire had bought them were like gold.

“You guys only need to do one thing.”

Shin YuSung pointed to the floor of the building and continued speaking calmly.

“Team up with the long-range group and protect the base.”

The F Class students were looking at each other as if trying to make sure that they had heard him correctly. Renia gulped and began to stammer her words out.

“Does that mean... er.”

Shin YuSung replied to the question that was on the minds of everyone in the rest stop building as if it was matter-of-fact.

“We only need two people for the infiltration portion of the plan.”

Shin YuSung and Sumire would destroy the opposing team while everyone else from F Class would defend the base. It was a simple, reckless plan, but it was the one with the greatest chance for success.

“G-got it!”

“H-hey, you all heard what YuSung just said, right!?”

“Yeah! We just have to protect the base! Simple!”

Sumire’s guerilla plan had also reduced the numbers of the opposing team, which helped.

“Let’s do this!”

“We can win!”

F Class’s morale pierced through the heavens as Shin YuSung made his move.

* * *

The top floor of the abandoned hospital...

Jin MinAh was chewing on her lip and shaking. Due to the circumstances, she had somehow gotten the role of protecting the hostage from F Class.

“Goddammit. What happens if they take the hostage from us? Then it’ll be our fault that we lose.”

Sung IkHyun sighed at her mutterings.

“That’s why we need to seize this chance and claim victory... if Shin YuSung gets here, he’ll just destroy all of us.”

“And how are we going to do that? We don’t even know who the invader is yet...”

Jin MinAh began grumbling. Once again, Sung IkHyun sighed and pointed a finger towards the steel door.

“...Hoo. There’s no news from the reconnaissance group yet. I guess that means it’s my turn to go on patrol.”

“But Kang MinSu told us to protect the hostage.”

“Hey! Patrolling counts as protecting the hostage! Shouldn’t we do more than just sit here and do nothing?”

She began to roll that idea around in her head, slowly biting her lip, then glancing towards Lin Xiao.

“Ugh... what should we do...”

“If you’re so unsure about this, let’s just take the hostage with us when we patrol!”

Sung IkHyun finally lost his patience at her excessive worrying and began to lose his temper.

“Are you crazy!? What happens if Kang MinSu catches us out there?”

“Park HaWon is the leader of D Class, not Kang MinSu,” he replied, a displeased expression on his face that Jin MinAh ended up succumbing to.

“Okay, then... if you find another reconnaissance group, try to bring them here, got it? I’ll be locking the steel door in the meantime.”

Sung IkHyun quickly nodded his head at the compromise that she had given him.

“Okay! Protect him well!”

He was definitely trying to do something useful to stand out.

An excited Sung IkHyun waved to his fellow classmate and went down

the stairs. Jin MinAh then locked the door and let out a sigh.

“Ugh... he wants me to protect the hostage on my own...?”

Lin Xiao, who had been watching the two of them from the corner of the room, nodded his head as if approving of Sung IkHyun’s decision.

“It’s not a bad idea. In the case where all communication is cut off, the worst thing you could possibly do is twiddle your thumbs and do nothing.”

“That’s only if nothing happens to them, though.”

And ten minutes passed like that. Jin MinAh began to worry as Sung IkHyun had still not come back.

‘...Why isn’t he back yet? He’s already been out for a while. Who knows when the enemy is going to come?!’

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Right then, someone started thumping against the steel door. Jin MinAh narrowed her eyes, then walked up to the reinforced glass window placed in the door to check who was on the other side.

‘It’s Sung IkHyun.’

Her classmate was the one hitting the door.

For some reason, his face was as pale as a sheet of paper, and he was not saying anything.

“No one’s following you, right?”

Sung IkHyun weakly nodded, eyes clenched shut. Jin MinAh finally let him in.

Creeeak!

As the door swung open, Jin MinAh finally realized why he was so pale.

“You! Y-you’re...”

On the other side of the entranceway was a death knight, holding up the male student with one hand. Sumire stood behind them, fiddling with her fingers.

Thump!

The death knight threw aside the knocked-out Sung IkHyun.

Crash!

Sumire threw a glance towards the fallen student, then turned back towards Jin MinAh to make a request.

“Um, excuse me... do you think you could just black out like him?”

“What the hell are you saying?!”

Jin MinAh gave a little shriek and began to back away. As she did so, the death knight bowed its head as a show of deference to Sumire.

“Master... your... next orders!”

“Th-then, please make it painless...” she said, glancing at the other girl.

The death knight began to walk towards Jin MinAh with heavy strides.

“Ergh, shit! Aaah!”

The D Class student raised her weapon and charged towards the death knight, but the artifact-boosted monster was stronger.

Bam!

Jin MinAh was hit by the death knight's own sword attack, flew through the air like a sack of potatoes, then hit the opposite wall.

Boom!

Sumire was more meticulous than she looked. She grabbed the fallen Jin MinAh's Pocket and checked the remaining barrier value to see if it had been completely shattered.

"This palace has been taken care of, as well..."

Sumire looked around the room, only belatedly noticing the hostage, Lin Xiao. She hurriedly ran towards him.

"I-Instructor-nim!"

She freed him from his bonds.

As a teacher working at the Academy, Lin Xiao was sincerely shocked at Sumire's incredible growth.

"That Sumire... has become th-this strong?"

Shin YuSung immediately came to mind.

That boy had completely conquered Jewel Island and had destroyed the boss monster, the crystal golem, in the cave.

It seemed like his monstrous qualities had rubbed off on Sumire after she had started partnering with him.

'I don't know what Shin YuSung taught her, but it must have been really effective...'

Lin Xiao wondered if perhaps the boy was more suited to be an instructor than himself. Sumire began to giggle in a distasteful manner as if she could read his thoughts.

'With all that I did during this exam... I'm sure Shin YuSung-ssi will

praise me.'

Her aspirations were as small as the confidence she usually showed.

Chapter 36

Sumire had rescued the hostage.

Lin Xiao, now free, stood up from his spot on the ground and checked his body.

“Good, all of the bindings are gone.”

“Instructor Lin Xiao! P-please follow me!”

The desperate situation she was in caused her to quicken her speech, but Lin Xiao shook his head.

“No! I wish I could comply with the hunter who saved me, but a fracture happened in my right leg when the villains kidnapped me. I can’t move at the moment,” he replied firmly.

“Wh-what!? B-but... Instructor-nim’s leg is...”

Sumire, in tears, pointed a finger towards Lin Xiao’s perfectly fine leg. He ignored her and continued to give her the scenario.

“So! you must take the appropriate action by using a splint and triangular bandages on my leg. Only then can I leave this location!”

“G-got it!”

Following his explanation of the situation, Sumire searched around the room for any available tools she could use. As it turned out, she found a splint and triangular bandages that Lin Xiao had prepared beforehand.

Tap tap!

Sumire walked over, grabbed the two items, and went back to the instructor to begin his first aid.

“Where does it hurt?! Is it over here?”

“Let’s say it’s my knee that’s been fractured. One hour has passed. There’s just a crack in the bone.”

Lin Xiao gave her a very difficult assignment, as expected of someone who was infamous for treating practice situations as if they were real. But Sumire was actually a very accomplished student and excelled in taking notes.

“I understand!”

Due to it, this level of first-aid was not a problem for her. In fact, she finished the task in record time.

“I-it’s done! I used the bandages to secure the splint. Let’s see how the wound develops... if your fracture isn’t serious, then later we can...”

Lin Xiao smiled proudly as she gave an honor-student level explanation and stopped her with an outstretched palm.

“Stop! Enough, that was perfect.”

“Thank you very much! but I don’t think I did anything worth being praised about...”

Sumire’s voice grew smaller due to her embarrassment. Lin Xiao, satisfied, ripped off the splint and bandages.

“Yes! The first aid was a success! Now, I will follow you wherever!”

“Then... we have to return to the base, so let’s head down to the first floor...”

“Sounds good! Let’s go, quick!”

The instructor gave a boisterous laugh and left through the steel door. Sumire began to assure herself.

‘Now victory really is within arm’s reach... ’

All she had to do was lead the rescued hostage back to the base, then Sumire would become the lead actor of the intramural test.

‘Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi... will be happy with me, right?’

While descending the stairs, Sumire began subconsciously thinking about a scene where Shin YuSung was happy: a Shin YuSung who was generous with his praise. Sumire’s lips were trembling as if she couldn’t wait for it to happen.

‘W-with everything that I’ve done, he’ll... ’

[You did well, Sumire.]

In her fantasies, Shin YuSung was saying this and softly patting her head.

“Hee, heehee...”

Sumire suddenly began to emit a creepy sound from her mouth. Surprised, Lin Xiao turned to face her, expression puzzled.

“Wh-what’s wrong? Is there a problem?”

“Nope! None at all!”

She slammed her mouth shut, caught in the act, and frantically shook her head in denial. Lin Xiao narrowed his eyes at his student, who was covered in a cold sweat.

‘What a strange girl.’

This was the conclusion that anyone who met her came to, but Sumire did not mind how he looked at her. Her head was currently filled with

the thought of what praise Shin YuSung would give her.

* * *

Following Park HaWon's commands, the top 10 strongest students of D Class created an assault squad. Their only goal was to occupy the F Class's base.

"Shin YuSung isn't in the rest stop right now! Everyone's ready, right?"

"There's nothing to 'get ready' for, fighting them is gonna be easy since they're weak as hell, even if there's more of them overall."

"True, true. All of their student rankings are outside of the top 100."

The assault squad's morale was through the roof. Without the Seven, Shin YuSung, standing in their way, they thought that it would be child's play to take over the opponent's base.

But F Class still had a strategy that Shin YuSung had left with them.

The moment of truth.

Lee SiWoo, who was left in charge of commanding his classmates as per Shin YuSung's orders, smirked.

"Hey, D Class is here! Renia!"

"Uh, I-I'm really gonna do it?!"

"What did I say! Do it now! Immediately!"

Renia set fire to the barricade. Thanks to the park fire getting rid of the stealth unit, they could set up a barricade around the rest area. At that moment, that plan was coming to fruition.

Blaze! Crackle!

The powerful flames crawled up the encircling barricade and turned it into a giant curtain of fire that protected the building. D Class made their move to try and put out the fire in order to attack the base, but F Class did not stand back and let them do it.

“Everyone! Go all out!”

At Lee SiWoo’s signal, his classmates began pelting the assault squad with their long-range attacks.

“Destroy D Class!”

“We’re also capable of winning!”

“As long as we hold out, YuSung will win for us!”

Woosh! Crack!

Lee SiWoo’s arrow shattered the barrier belonging to one of the assault squad members. This was all due to the opening that Shin YuSung’s strategy, the fire wall, had created.

“Oh ho! I hit one!”

Lee SiWoo clenched his fist and gave a shout, heightening the fervor of his classmates even more.

“Ooh! We’re winning!”

“You saw that, right? We really can do it!”

The students who couldn’t perform long-range attacks with their Traits were even slinging rocks at the enemy, and all of this combined to create a fierce counterattack. D Class’s assault squad eventually had to admit defeat.

“Retreat!”

“Retreat for now! Everyone, pull back!”

The assault squad grew fainter and fainter into the distance.

Lee SiWoo lifted his chin with a proud expression on his face while thinking of Shin YuSung.

‘He really is incredible.’

Even after leaving the base, Shin YuSung’s plan had saved everyone in F Class while they were defending the base. It was all possible due to the fact that the Fist King had taught the boy how to use tactics in real-life situations on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain.

As Lee SiWoo didn’t know about this, all he could do was be in awe of Shin YuSung’s wisdom.

‘How do his plans always fall so neatly in place?’

This was a good opportunity for Lee SiWoo.

[In the case that I have to serve someone, the stronger, the better.]

It was something that he had been thinking about ever since he was little. To him, Shin YuSung was the man who suited that position the best.

* * *

Class president Park HaWon bit her lip, an expression full of despair on her face.

‘...Ten seconds! How could they not even last for ten seconds?’

Third place among the Sevens.

The person in question, Shin YuSung, was as strong as the title suggested. As proof, the three students who were protecting Park HaWon were wiped out in an instant as soon as Shin YuSung left the rest area.

That was how overwhelmingly powerful he was.

Under pressure, Park HaWon took the chance to just barely make her escape. But she couldn't widen the distance between him and her anymore.

"Hahh... hahh!"

The building in front of her was the restaurant, near the plot of land that was neutral territory; it was where she had placed the main attacking force, the battalion.

Due to this, there was a D Class student who greeted Park HaWon outside the building. They waved their arm towards her.

"Prez! Over here! Hurry! I heard you from the radio!"

"...Hahh, I can barely breathe."

Park HaWon stopped in place to catch her breath.

The class president was not physically fit. In fact, lack of physical strength was a shared weakness among hunters who relied solely on their Traits.

The core member of the battalion, Ju HaJin, grimaced at her sorry state.

"You really should've trained your body a bit more, huh?"

"Is this really the time to pick a fight with me?"

Park HaWon placed her glasses back on her face after taking them off. Ju HaJin grumbled.

"And who gave operational authority to Jin MinAh and Sung IkHyun instead of me?"

"I'm sorry. It's my bad, okay? So think up a plan to stop that monster

already.”

Park HaWon pointed in a certain direction with her finger. There, Shin YuSung was slowly walking towards the group, long hair swaying in the wind.

“I-Is he planning to take on all of us?”

“...That’s a bit much, even for a Seven.”

“Just how much is that bastard looking down on us?”

The D Class battalion began to talk amongst themselves.

“Hey, prez, what do you think? Can we stop him?” asked Ju HaJin, whose face had adopted a sickly pallor.

“...We have to stop him, no matter what it takes.”

“That so?”

Ju Hajin took out a pill from his Pocket and put it in his pants pocket. That pill was a supplement, a kind of hunter gear.

‘This is an item that a person usually needs permission from the Hunter Association to get... ’

Somehow, Ju HaJin’s Pocket contained one of those pills. He couldn’t figure out who had sent him the supplements.

However, the temptation to use it was strong.

‘If I take the supplement and fight against Shin YuSung with the battalion... ’

Ju HaJin thought about doing so long and hard as he watched Shin YuSung approach the group. Nevertheless, he ended up not leaving the pill in his pants pocket.

‘...Whatever. Shit. No matter how much I want to win against him, what’s the point of fighting Shin YuSung after taking it?’

But even at a glance, one could feel the overwhelming amount of mana lying within the boy. To Ju HaJin, Shin YuSung was an opponent that so thoroughly transcended him that any number of supplements wouldn’t be enough to guarantee his victory against him.

‘If he’s going to wipe the floor with me, I may as well do it fair and square... ’

Making his decision, Ju HaJin smirked and readied his stance. Park HaWon gave orders to the entire battalion.

“It’s really grinding my gears that our enemy is just one person, but... Let’s give it our all.”

Step step. Tup.

Shin YuSung stopped his march towards the D Class battalion. With an expressionless gaze, he surveyed the area, then touched his Pocket.

Woosh!

Shin YuSung’s school uniform split into countless fragments and scattered into the wind. At the same time, the elegantly antiquated Black Dragon’s Hide replaced it.



Shin YuSung was thinking of trying out his newly-acquired artifact during the test.

Unlike the grim resolution held by the D Class students, he was rather relaxed. Shin YuSung had finally figured out how strong he was. Even alone, Shin YuSung was the predator, and even when there were many, D Class was the prey. His strength was simply on a different level.

Tap!

The smiling Shin YuSung kicked his foot against the ground. In the same instant, his form disappeared from sight.

The hunt had begun.

Chapter 37

The abandoned hospital, which had fallen into chaos...

The D Class students managed to calm down and strike back. However, Sumire was giving each undead monster detailed instructions on how to fight.

“M-Mr. Death Knight! Please push the opponent back with your shield! An-and... skeleton archers, support him from as far a distance as possible!”

All of the close-range fighters collapsed like a house of cards as the death knight swung its shield.

“Waagh! Keuk!”

As the formation broke, the students lending support from the back were slowly whittled down by the skeleton archers, with their barriers breaking left and right.

“How the hell is F Class this strong?”

“Ack! Where’s Kang MinSu?”

Sumire kept pressing forwards while leading the undead monsters. Of course, one of them would fall to the enemy’s attacks every once in a while, but Sumire still had a large reserve of mana.

Woosh!

Sumire’s ring shone, and black mana began to pour from it. As it did so, even more undead began to crawl out of the ground.

“No way...”

The formation had already collapsed.

When Sumire's army began to swarm the D Class students, they lost the will to fight. Sumire quickly turned towards the exit, wanting to leave the building. Lin Xiao nodded at her with a proud expression on his face.

"You're doing very well by yourself."

Even the notoriously difficult Lin Xiao had to praise her exploits.

"...Th-thank you very much."

Sumire scratched her head, bashful, and placed a hand on the wall to support herself. A long, dark hallway stretched out before her. All she had to do was cross it, and she would complete her mission.

'Quickly... '

Sumire began walking down the hallway with her death knight, who was the strongest undead she had control over. Her steps quickened, and she reached halfway. As she did so, the door to her escape suddenly opened.

Rattle! Boom!

The person who had opened the door was Kang MinSu.

He was the second-in-command of D Class that the class president, Park HaWon, herself had acknowledged. He looked at Sumire from a distance.

"Checkmate," he muttered.

Snap!

Kang MinSu snapped his fingers. The lights turned on, bathing the pitch-black hallway with green light.

“This is...”

Frazzled, Sumire began to check the lights. Kang MinSu gripped the air with his right hand.

“Catch her!” he shouted.

Wriggle wriggle!

Mana began to emit from his hand. Suddenly, vines began to grow and cover the entire hallway.

“Cl... clack!”

“M-master!”

The skeletons and the death knight were already completely captured by the vines. Lin Xiao stared up at the ceiling, impressed. He was completely fine.

“So you planted hunter gear in advance... Good thinking, anyone who tries to leave this building has to pass this hallway, after all.”

“Ah, m-my undead are...”

Sumire panicked while looking at her trapped subjects. Kang MinSu’s plant trap had dealt a huge blow to her.

“...Oh, I forgot to deal with the most important one.”

The D Class student turned his gaze towards Sumire and gripped the air again.

Woosh!

His mana enabled the vines to grow even more.

His plant-related Trait summoned a mass of brambles that wrapped itself around Sumire’s right arm.

“H-heck!”

A burning pain began to crawl up her arm.

The plant inflamed her mana, relaying near-unbearable pain through it to the host. Kang MinSu coolly stared her down.

“...Give up and turn off your barrier. My plants are thrice as strong under these lights.”

If she turned off the barrier from her Pocket, she would be disqualified from the test. That meant that her plan to rescue the hostage would also be a failure.

‘...Give up?’

Even in the midst of dizzying pain, Shin YuSung came to her mind. To Sumire, nothing was as terrifying as disappointing the boy who had put his trust in her.

‘I-I don’t want to do that... ’

The brambles kept squeezing her arm, but Sumire endured the pain, forcing back her tears.

Kang MinSu grimaced at her stubborn attitude and began to nag her.

“Didn’t you hear me? Just acknowledge that you’ve lost, and I’ll clear these pl—”

“...N-no thanks.”

Sumire glared at the boy, even as drops of water began to fall down her face. Kang MinSu began to mock her in response.

“...I think you’re misunderstanding something.”

Squeeze!

The brambles wrapped around her arm began crushing it even harder. Sumire gasped out loud in pain. Blood kept running down her limb, but the injury wasn't important to Sumire.

“Heuk!”

“The reason why everything's been working out for you until now isn't due to your skills but due to Shin YuSung.”

Kang MinSu began to belittle her.

He sneered in a sickening manner and gripped the air once more.

“Your strength is only as strong as any schmuck outside of the top 100, just as weak as any other F Class student.”

Squeeeeeeze!

“Ackk!”

Sumire let out a stilted cry.

The sharp thorns of the plant had already shredded her arm into pieces. On top of that, the bramble was absorbing her mana. She couldn't put strength in the limb anymore.

Even so, Sumire did not give up. In fact, she was staring back at Kang MinSu, eyes splotched red by her tears.

* * *

“...I-I already k-know that.”

Sumire knew about her own weakness well before Kang MinSu had told her about it. Ever since she was young, her fearful, passive, and unmotivated personality had caused her to live a life where others had pushed her around. To her, it was inevitable that she would disappoint everyone she came across; she may have already become accustomed to failure.

[Why did it have to be F-rank...]

[What? You went all the way to Korea, and you're last in the rankings?]

[You really are...]

But even so, it always hurt to see the look of disappointment on someone's face.

'I am... '

Sumire lowered her head.

Even as she felt that she didn't deserve to think this, Sumire wanted to be praised and trusted more than anyone; that was why Shin YuSung's praise towards Sumire was so special to her.

[...It really is a good thing that I signed you up for this raid.]

His voice rang throughout her head. Sumire clenched her right arm and fist. Even when the pain stung enough to make it feel like her limb was being torn off, she gritted her teeth through it without so much as a whimper.

This was Shin YuSung's plan. Shin YuSung, who had believed in her. Her wounded arm could be treated later, but this was the only chance Sumire had to repay the boy for his help.

"Even so, I can't give up!"

Woosh! Flare!

Right then—

Mana began to rush and swirl around her arm.

"Wh-what's going on!?"

Kang MinSu lifted his arms to protect his face from the sudden blast of wind and took a step back.

“Are you actually...?!”

The sole talent that God had bestowed upon Sumire was her mana. She knew very well about the one strength she had.

‘If the vines are going to absorb my mana... ’

Sumire’s arm was overflowing with mana. Violent gusts of wind engulfed the area.

Booooooom!

Sumire was pumping out all of the mana in her body, creating a shockwave of sound.

‘Until the limit!’

Bam! Pop!



All of the lights and plants in the hallway exploded. Kang MinSu's vines had failed to absorb the full extent of Sumire's mana.

Kang MinSu, face pale in shock, looked at Sumire and began to mutter to himself as if broken.

“N-no way... m-my vines were defeated... by an F Class...”

Sumire, in a daze, began to inspect her body. Green sap from the vines covered her head to toe, and her right arm was a red, bloody mess.

‘But... ’

There were no more plants in the hallway.

The undead were freed from their bonds, and Kang MinSu was the only one left that she had to fight.

“Hh, h, uu...”

Sumire, a mess, turned her gaze towards the D Class student. The undead army behind her aimed their fierce vigor towards the last remaining opponent.

“Cl... clack!”

“You will pay with... your death...”

In the end, Kang MinSu took off the Pocket from his wrist and dropped it on the ground; his body followed suit.

“It’s my loss...”

As he made the declaration, Sumire finally began to cry.

“I... I... won...”

The fact that she had managed to complete the mission on her own made this victory even more precious to her. Lin Xiao, who had been watching the two students fight, was crying hot, passionate tears.

“...Sniff! You are just... the most!”

Lin Xiao misunderstood something.

To the man, Sumire's actions, borne from a desire to do her utmost for Shin YuSung, looked like she was going through all of that suffering because she was treating the test like it was real.

"You're the greatest, Sumire of F Class! Instructor Lin Xiao will remember this fight for the rest of his life!"

"Th-thank you very much..."

"No wonder Shin YuSung took you to the Association! If he wanted a partner who wasn't a burden, I bet he needed someone with at least this much resolve!"

"Huh!? I-I'm Shin YuSung-ssi's part...?... Ah, aheehee, th-that's going a little too far!"

The corners of Sumire's mouth were quirked up, and she began to scratch her head in embarrassment. With a proud expression on his face, Lin Xiao checked his Pocket. His face froze.

"In all my years as an instructor... th-this is the first time that I've ever seen this result."

[All members of the D Class battalion have been disqualified. The D Class leader was among those disqualified.]

[The majority of D Class forces have been eliminated. F Class has successfully protected their base.]

[Requesting early termination of the exam if F Class safely returns with the hostage.]

[-Professor So HaeJung-]

Lin Xiao had just read a message sent to him by professor So HaeJung. While he had already expected Shin YuSung to show great prowess during the test, the thought that the boy would eliminate the entire D Class battalion in such a short amount of time had never even crossed

his mind.

Lin Xiao, in a cold sweat, turned his gaze towards the exit. Shin YuSung had expertly guided F Class with his plan and made Sumire into a force to be reckoned with. On top of that, he had singlehandedly destroyed D Class.

‘...Just what is the extent of his abilities?’

Even with all of his accomplishments, Shin YuSung had never shown his limits. Even his instructor, Lin Xiao, had no insight into the boy’s seemingly bottomless amount of skill.

Chapter 38

The building, already in ruins.

Park HaWon, the class president of D Class, forced her eyes open.

“Augh, what the hell... did I pass out?”

Dirt was flying up in clouds all around D Class’s battalion members, who were strewn all over the floor. Park HaWon glanced carefully at Ju HaJin, then collapsed back on the ground with a sigh.

“Haah, I can’t believe... we were all eliminated... by just Shin YuSung.”

That was when she realized that the only way they could have beaten F Class was to try and occupy their base.

‘We shouldn’t have fought... a monster like that in the first place.’

One of the arms on her glasses was broken. She placed it back on her face nonetheless and shakily stood up. A surge of emotion flared up within her as she looked at Shin YuSung, who didn’t even have a speck of dirt on him.

‘How is that guy so strong when he has a lower rank Trait than me?’

Swept up by her sense of inferiority, Park HaWon began to yell at Shin YuSung.

“Hey! What do you mean... you’re in F Class?”

This situation was incredibly unfair to her.

To her, it was a given that D Class would win against F Class. The

other D Class students believed the same thing without a single shred of doubt. However, Shin YuSung had completely thrown what seemed to be a written rule of the universe over its head. Park HaWon was irritated, but wasn't sure herself why specifically she was angry at Shin YuSung. She didn't think about that and instead began her discontent at him.

"Your Trait isn't F-rank, right? There's no way you are, not when you're this strong! You must've scammed or cheated somehow!"

In lieu of replying, Shin YuSung simply approached Park HaWon, legs forming long strides until standing in front of her. He was a good half a head taller than her. Cowered by his presence, the female student took a step backwards.

"...Ugh."

Shin YuSung looked down at the cowering Park HaWon with a blank expression on his face. Her previous bluster was all but gone at this point. She looked at him, not meeting his eyes.

"A-am I wrong?"

Park HaWon mustered up the courage to give an act of feeble resistance. Only then did Shin YuSung open his mouth.

"You are. The rank of a hunter's Trait isn't what's important."

This was what the Fist King had taught him and the path that he had been going down for the past ten-odd years. The Shin-Oh family had abandoned Shin YuSung for his F-rank Trait, but the Fist King had discovered his talent and had made it blossom. That was when Shin YuSung had wholeheartedly believed that the worth of a hunter didn't lie solely on the rankings of their Traits that the Association had given them.

"That's... just what *you* think."

Even so, Park HaWon did not back down and held steadfast to her stubborn attitude.

“F-ranks are weak. S-ranks are strong. This is common sense! Everyone knows this! You’re just a freak!” she screamed, anger rising to her head. Shin YuSung glared and began to speak, the words coming out slow and unhurried.

“Yes. Like you’ve said: some people are born with more talent than others.”

Shin YuSung drew in a breath.

He met Park HaWon’s eyes, then continued in a considerate tone of voice.

“Because effort doesn’t always translate to results.”

Park HaWon stopped breathing at his words. The words ‘talent’ and ‘effort’ had always been a source of frustration for her. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t even approach the top 10 in the student rankings, let alone become a Seven. She always thought that the reason for this was because she had been born with a D-rank Trait.

She believed wholeheartedly that she would have reached those positions if she had been born with an S-rank Trait.

The existence of Shin YuSung, who possessed great skill despite his F-rank Trait, drove her inferiority complex over the edge.

But at the same time, his existence also drove her desire to become stronger.

“Even so, don’t set arbitrary limits on yourself because you’re so caught up in the rank of your Trait.”

Park HaWon bit her lip in an effort to force her irritation back down her throat.

“...Easy for you to say.”

She had completely lost to him, both within and outside of the exam. Park HaWon fiddled with her broken glasses and turned her head to

the side.

* * *

Korea's greatest academy, Gaon.

The test between the elites of this academy, the members of S Class and A Class, was significant enough for the world to take note of. K Channel, of course, didn't miss the opportunity they had with their broadcasting rights to film this event.

"As we speak, S Class has begun destroying A Class's formation in a full-frontal assault!"

K Channel had dispatched Yu HanNah.

She was acting as a reporter, the microphone tightly clenched in her fist. S Class and A Class had many students in them who were strong, but even among them, the ones who caught people's attention were Sevens: Adela and Kim EunAh.

"Ah! Miss Adela's solo attack has already eliminated five people!"

Like Yu HanNah had said, Adela had swept her ice over the A Class's formation and defeated a large number of students in one move.

"Student Kim EunAh is also making a full-frontal assault! It looks like she's aiming for Adela!"

Kim EunAh was exuding electricity from every pore, not even giving enemies a chance to approach her.

Bzzt! Bzz!

Her electricity was strong enough that a person's barrier was liable to explode on contact with it. On top of that, her Trait had a long, wide range. The S Class students were having a hard time trying to muster up the courage to attack her.

“Oho! Student Kim EunAh, what strength! She pierces through the solid guard created by S Class and approaches student Adela! Is this perhaps the beginning of A Class’s comeback?”

Unlike Yu HanNah’s words, however, A Class was in a fairly rough spot. Kim EunAh was showing great prowess, but at the end of the day, that was just one of the Sevens, Kim EunAh.

The other students of S Class were suppressing the A Class members. On top of that, 4th in the student rankings, Min SungHyuk, managed to catch up to Kim EunAh using his invisibility.

“And who do you think you are, approaching our leader?”

Bam!

Min SungHyuk kicked her in the back. Losing her balance, Kim EunAh was thrown to the ground.

“Hyaa! Pbbt, spit!”

She grabbed her tangled hair and spit the dirt out of her mouth.

“You son of a...”

Face set in a grimace, Kim EunAh looked up at Min SungHyuk. A chill went down the boy’s spine.

Boom!

Kim EunAh stomped on the ground, and a flurry of electricity made a beeline towards Min SungHyuk. The boy tried to pivot his body to avoid the attack, but he couldn’t move faster than the lightning.

“Keukuk!”

Hit by the electricity, Min SungHyuk fell onto his knees, then the ground. Kim EunAh turned her head right after she had defeated him.

Wshh! Slice!

At that split second, a dagger flew by and grazed her cheek. The weapon belonged to S Class's Lee ChaeHyun.

“...Hah.”

Kim EunAh smirked. Lee ChaeHyun took out another dagger from her Pocket and narrowed her eyes.

“How about you stop all of this prancing around you're doing?”

“Says who?”

Kim EunAh looked at Lee ChaeHyun, who wore the smile of victory on her face. This girl knew better than anyone else why Kim EunAh's Trait was A-rank, as well as what her weaknesses were.

“...How about your esteemed brother? I bet he'll be disgusted at the sight of you tromping around like a gorilla everywhere. Oh! Wait.”

Lee ChaeHyun pivoted from the sentence as if she had just remembered something.

“He's still in a coma, right? Thank god, he won't be here to see this, then.”

She provoked the other girl.

Kim EunAh began to glare at Lee ChaeHyun.

“...What the hell did you just say?”

Crack! Crackkkkle!

The sound was like a clap of thunder in the middle of a rainstorm.

As Kim EunAh's temper rose, bursts of electricity, even stronger than previous ones, started to emit from her in uncontrollable fits. It was as

if her Trait was responding to the emotions of its master.

This was what Lee ChaeHyun was aiming for.

She continued to taunt Kim EunAh even more. This wasn't enough.

“Didn't you hear me? You want me to say it again?”

“I heard everything, you crazy bitch!”

Kim EunAh let out a roar from her mouth and threw a punch at Lee ChaeHyun.

Bzz! Bzzzt!

Electricity carved a destructive path along her fist, ominously crackling all the way, but it dissipated into the air without harming a single hair on Lee ChaeHyun's head.

“ And where are you aiming? Hm?”

The girl laughed and threw her dagger, which nicked Kim EunAh's thigh.

Wsh! Drip.

Red blood began to pour down her pale thigh.

Enraged, Kim EunAh ignored the wound and—gritting her teeth—ran towards Lee ChaeHyun.

Buzz! Bzzzt!!

But the stronger her rage got, the wilder her electricity ran amok.

“Man~ even as a Seven, an A Class student is just an A Class student, huh? Why is your accuracy so bad?”

Lee ChaeHyun was trapping Kim EunAh with her insults. Her goal was not to eliminate Kim EunAh because if they fought one-on-one, Lee ChaeHyun would definitely lose. Her goal was to keep the ace of the opposing team occupied for the sake of her own class.

Bzz! Bzzt!

Yu HanNah continued to give her commentary with fervor.

“A Class’s ace, Kim EunAh, is being held up by student Lee ChaeHyun! And all the while, A Class’s situation is getting more and more dire...”

Flash!

A bolt of lightning struck from the clear sky. As it did so, Kim EunAh’s body disappeared.

Kim EunAh appeared behind Lee ChaeHyun. If electricity wasn’t going to work, she would just have to fight her opponent in close combat.

Boom!

Kim EunAh appeared in a flash of blue lightning.

“Got you.”

“Th-this speed!”

Lee ChaeHyun hadn’t underestimated her opponent.

Kim EunAh’s light-speed teleportation, enabled by her electricity Trait, could physically not be followed by Lee ChaeHyun’s senses.

Squeeze!

Kim EunAh grabbed Lee ChaeHyun’s collar.

“C-cough! Urk!”

Lee ChaeHyun, with her breathing cut off, started to gag. The A Class student looked at this sight, expressionless.

Bzz! Bzzt!

Blue lightning began to surround Kim EunAh's hand.

“You're too slow!”

She swung her fist, yelling.

Splinter!

Right then, a sphere made of ice appeared in front of Kim EunAh's fist. As she hit it, it encased her arm.

Crrrrack!

“Khh!”

She lost her balance. More ice began flying at her from the back and hit her leg.

Bam!

“Keuk!”

Kim EunAh gasped and fell to the ground.

Immediately, the chill emanating from the ground grabbed ahold of her legs.

“...You, you!”

Kim EunAh, consumed by her anger, began to struggle with all her might. But it was no use, her body was pinned down by the ice. Only then did she take the time to look at her surroundings.

While Lee ChaeHyun was taking up her attention, A Class had been completely destroyed. It was S Class's complete victory.

Trot trot.

S Class's leader, Adela, lowered her gaze down at a fuming Kim EunAh.

Her expression was hard to read.

Right after, she walked away from Kim EunAh without a word. Lee ChaeHyun coughed and regained her breath before approaching her opponent.

“Ah~ I really thought I was gonna die there! Fufu, EunAh. Sorry~ are you pissed?”

She began to laugh at Kim EunAh.

Kim EunAh, still trapped in the ice, ground her teeth and looked up at the other girl. Lee ChaeHyun began to pet her head.

“Don't hate me too much for this. This is all~ for the sake of the test. You understand, right? Since you're a hunter as well?”

She continued to laugh at Kim EunAh, sitting on the ground in a way where she was crouched down to the other girl's level.



“So take this opportunity to fix that fiery personality of yours. You can’t even use your Trait properly when you get all pissed, right~? This was all~ done for your sake. Got it?”

Lee ChaeHyun pinched Kim EunAh's cheek. The defeated girl let out a guttural cry.

But nothing had changed.

Kim EunAh was still trapped by the ice, and A Class had still lost. She had led her own class to its downfall because she couldn't control her own emotions.

The A Class student bit her lip as she watched her classmates being loaded up onto the stretchers.

Her feelings began to dribble out of her mouth like coarse sand.

"Disgusting..."

Blood was dripping from her mouth because of how hard she had bit her lip earlier.

"Really..."

Tug.

Kim EunAh tightly gripped her bangs. Her well-groomed hair was in shambles, but that wasn't what was important to her.

More than anything, Kim EunAh was suffering under the fact that she had lost to Lee ChaeHyun, who had bad-mouthed her brother.

Chapter 39

It was F Class's victory.

The main characters of the test, Sumire and Shin YuSung, returned to the rest stop. Their classmates began to cheer for them loud enough for the roof to blow off.

"It's YuSung!"

"Our hero!"

"We won! We really won against D Class!"

"...Is this really happening?"

"Of course it is. Our class has Shin YuSung! I knew we'd win!"

The students were causing an uproar, chanting Shin YuSung's name. It was the first time that the constant losses experienced by F Class had come to an end, as they had secured their first win. It was no surprise that they were feeling exuberant about it.

Shin YuSung smiled pleasantly as he watched his classmates gather around him.

"It's all due to you guys believing in me and carrying out the plan."

No matter how high his combat capabilities were, it was impossible for Shin YuSung to win in the intramurals by himself. The rules were set in stone: to win, teamwork was crucial.

Shin YuSung had become the previously nonexistent central figure of F Class, effectively uniting the class as one as his classmates put their beliefs in him—that was how they managed to become victorious in the intramurals.

“And... Sumire was the one who performed the special mission and rescued the hostage all by herself.”

Shin YuSung brought up Sumire’s name while he was talking calmly. Shocked, Sumire tried to foist all of the praise back onto him.

“Eh, what!? E-even still, it’s all due to... Shin YuSung-ssi’s plan, and if you hadn’t given me the artifact beforehand...”

She was physically showing her resistance by waving her arms around. Shin YuSung grinned.

“No, you played a crucial role during this intramural test. You did well, Sumire.”

Sumire’s face grew redder and redder as Shin YuSung complimented her. It was the praise from Shin YuSung that she had been longing for all this time.

‘Shin YuSung-ssi complimented me... ’

She tried her best to keep her grin under control, but even so, the corners of her mouth began to curve up.

‘...Me!’

She had managed to repay a person’s trust in her by meeting their expectations instead of disappointing them. She was on cloud nine. Subconsciously, Sumire began to stare at Shin YuSung.

He was laughing, placed right in the center of the throng of F Class students. A kind of greed began to slowly grow in Sumire’s heart.

‘...If possible, I want to... keep fighting at the side of Shin YuSung-ssi.’

It wasn’t because Shin YuSung was strong. All she wanted to do was repay the boy who had believed and supported a girl who had been smack dab in last place.

‘...I want to be of assistance to him.’

Of course, to do so, Sumire had to become strong. In order to be chosen by Shin YuSung, to help him, Sumire had to keep growing.

‘I will become stronger.’

Sumire clenched both of her fists to show her resolve. Sumire was slowly changing due to Shin YuSung. Her steps were slow but steady, and she was putting in the effort. It was an incredibly positive development for her.

* * *

The theme park, after the tests had ended...

The students were allowed to use the facilities for free with permission from the Shinsung group. The amusement park was now open solely to students of Gaon Academy. The cries of schoolchildren rang in the air.

“Whoa! I bet there are more part-timers here than customers!”

“Hey, hey! The House of Horrors! I wanna go!”

“Remarkable. This is the first time in my life that I’ve seen an amusement park without a single line in it.”

The students were doing as they pleased, taking a break at the facility. While they were doing so, Lin Xiao, who had decided to make his way towards the restaurants, managed to bump into So HaeJung.

“Huh?”

“Hm?”

Their eyes instinctively met.

Lin Xiao squinted his eyes harder, in disbelief of what he was looking

at. The usually strict So HaeJung wore a mascot headband and held a half-eaten churro in her hand.

“Looks like you’re having fun.”

“I’m the sort of person who takes her breaks as seriously as her work.”

Their conversation was rather stilted.

Lin Xiao figured he should show some common courtesy, as they had met in front of a restaurant.

“Have you had lunch yet?”

“Nope.”

“How about we eat together?”

“...What’s on the menu?” So HaeJung asked, smoothly adjusting her glasses.

“China Moon*,” Lin Xiao replied curtly.

“Good. You pass.”

* * *

Jin ByungCheol, still at Gaon Academy, gave a small, proud smile as he heard the news of F Class’s victory.

“So F Class won! It’s a given, considering YuSung is there! Hah hah!”

Jin ByungCheol himself had made an important contribution to the exam by using his power as the headmaster to allow the use of artifacts. He had played a huge role in Shin YuSung and Sumire’s exploits during the test, and thus F Class’s victory.

“All that’s left are the Representative Selections...”

He fell into his blissful musings.

Considering Shin YuSung and Adela's skills, it was practically a given that the representative for the International Competition would be a student from Gaon.

'...The real problem is figuring out which one it will be out of those two.'

Jin ByungCheol fiddled with his beard, deep in thought. The representative in the International Competition was, more or less, representing the entire nation.

'Adela and Shin YuSung... '

First of all, Adela had an incredible amount of prominence outside of the school due to the various activities she had performed and the television appearances she had been in.

'They even created a fan club for her when she isn't a full-fledged hunter yet! That says it all... '

However, there was one aspect of Adela that marred her perfect record.

'No matter how strong she is, the thought of someone from Italy representing Korea is a little... '

This was not an opinion that solely Jin ByungCheol held. There were only a few cases in the past where someone represented a country that they were not native to.

'On the other hand, YuSung is... perfectly fine in that regard.'

He kept pondering the situation.

But only for a little while longer. It was in his best interests to set aside his thoughts concerning Adela and properly get his things in order, considering that he had already made his moves to support Shin YuSung.

“Then... It looks like I’ve decided on who to send.”

Jin ByungCheol reached towards his Pocket.

Shine!

[Extracurriculars Request Form]

[Contents: Busan, Metro City patrol]

[Participant(s): —]

A hologram appeared with the information in the request form. Becoming a city guard was one of the quickest ways one could gain the support of its citizens.

It was a fantastic opportunity for Shin YuSung, who was going to try and become the representative for the International Competition.

‘I was initially going to write Adela and YuSung here, but... ’

Jin ByungCheol used his finger to slowly write out the names in the participant section of the hologram form.

[Shin YuSung. Kim EunAh.]

It was a little odd for Adela, who was 1st place in the rankings, to be excluded, but Kim EunAh and Shin YuSung were 2nd and 3rd place, respectively. So it wasn’t too odd.

“Good, that’s one weight off my back.”

The headmaster, Jin ByungCheol.

The Association president, Kang YuChan.

The strongest in Korea, the Fist King.

Shin YuSung had started out as an orphan but had somehow ended up receiving the kind of support that put him above many other people.

* * *

This was the first time that Shin YuSung had ever experienced a waterpark.

In the past, he had been hit with water by the waterfall at the Martial Spirits' Mountain, but that was where the similarities ended. He ended up thinking deeply about the situation after nearly two hours of continuous playing.

‘...This place is... Too much.’

In contrast to the joyous times he had been experiencing earlier, Shin YuSung had a serious expression on his face.

‘Fun... ’

To someone who had continuously trained most of his life while trapped on a mountain, the relaxation he was experiencing at a theme park was completely outside of his comfort zone.

‘But... ’

In two hours, he could perform ten thousand punches. Shin YuSung ended up feeling unnecessary guilt over the break that he had a long time coming.

‘I haven’t even touched the Battle God Style’s 4th form... is it okay for me to spend my time like this?’

The life that he had lived up to this point was much too different compared to his peers. While regular students were sleeping in their homes, Shin YuSung had been stealing a quick nap inside a cave or on top of a tree.

While others students were eating meals that were cooked for them, Shin YuSung personally caught and cooked animals for himself to eat.

And now...

The sort of break that others were used to experiencing in their daily lives was completely foreign to Shin YuSung.

Sumire approached him carefully as if reading his turbulent thoughts.

“U-um... Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi?”

“Sumire?”

Shin YuSung turned his head towards her. Sumire fumbled with her lips, ears reddened. It seemed like she still needed more courage on her end.

“I-if it’s alright with you, do you... want to e-eat...”

Sumire was stuttering her words more than usual. Her face was also redder than usual, and she seemed to be on the verge of tears.

Right then, the relief pitchers appeared.

“YuSung! Let’s eat together!”

“Team Leader-nim! I’m here! Fuhaha! Us A Class got curb stomped, you know!”

—F Class’s Lee SiWoo and A Class’s Amy.

Lee SiWoo was waving his arm in greeting, and the newly-joined Amy was holding a large water gun in her hands. It seemed like she had been playing in the water before.

“Lunch? Sounds good. I was just getting hungry.”

Shin YuSung smiled and sat at the table. Lee SiWoo took the spot next to him.

“I knew you’d say that, so I brought a bunch of food! I bet even you’d

be surprised when you see the amount of food I fit in my Pocket!”

Lee SiWoo took out the food from his Pocket and placed it on the table. There were a great variety of dishes, all ones that he had never even seen before on Martial Spirits’ Mountain.

Shin YuSung, thinking deeply of the whole thing, gave a small smile as he looked at everything spread out on the table.

‘A break isn’t that bad... every once in a while.’

At that, Sumire managed to gather her courage and took out her homemade lunch from her Pocket.

“Shin YuSung-ssi! T-try my food!”

Sumire had made the lunch herself at the theme park’s lodgings. Even at a glance, you could see the amount of care she had put into it.

“Thank you. I’ll enjoy it.”

As Shin YuSung lifted his chopsticks, Sumire’s eyes widened, brightening up her usually dull pupils.

Amy was looking at Sumire’s delighted expression with displeasure.

“...Hm.”

Unlike her timid personality, Sumire had decided to wear a rather daring black bikini. Amy’s eyes narrowed further and further as she inspected the other girl’s body.

“...Hmmmm.”

Snk snk.

Suddenly, she began pumping air into her water gun.

“Hiyah!”

Spuuuurt!

Amy pulled the trigger on her water gun. The stream of water hit Sumire's chest in a bullseye.

“Hieek! Wh-why!?”

In shock, Sumire started tearing up and ran away, but Amy doggedly chased after her, screaming slang terms everywhere as she did so.

“Don't run~ fight back!”

The respite that visited Gaon Academy after a long period of trials felt more peaceful than usual.



Chapter 40

The sunbathed waterpark...

Lee SiWoo was laid down leisurely on a pool chair under a parasol.

“Hm, I never expected those two... to play together so well,” he mumbled.

Shin YuSung turned his gaze towards the swimming pool at the other boy’s words.

“Hahaha!”

“H-hiiek!”

Amy, excitedly pursuing Sumire.

And Sumire, running away in fear.

Shin YuSung began watching the two, but then suddenly, a beep came from his Pocket.

“This is?”

Ring! Voom!

[Extracurriculars Mission]

[Requester– Jin ByungCheol]

[Request Location– Busan, Metro City]

[Request Type– Daily Patrol]

[Request Reward– 200SP]

A hologram shot out of his Pocket as soon as Shin YuSung checked his message.

“Wow! The reward is 200SP? And the requester is our headmaster, on top of that?!”

Lee SiWoo, who had read the contents of the hologram next to him, began to shout, a surprised expression on his face.

Shin YuSung stared at the figure for a long while, hemming and hawing to himself.

“...Is 200SP a lot?”

“Of course! How many outing passes can that get you? There isn’t a single thing you can’t do at the Academy with this many points.”

“I see.”

Shin YuSung nodded, not showing any strong emotions. Lee SiWoo was puzzled by the other boy’s reaction.

“YuSung-ah, how many points do you have right now?”

“Around 600?”

“D-damn...”

The SP he had earned from getting a new record in the training room, the 150SP he had earned from winning the spar against Park SuHyun, and the points he had earned from the complete victory during the intramurals... Shin YuSung had managed to gather an incredible amount of SP—an amount that regular students would have trouble gathering even if they took a whole year.

It was no surprise that Lee SiWoo would be taken aback.

“Wow, that’s almost three times as much as me!”

Shin YuSung narrowed his eyes as he read through the details.

‘A mission sent directly from the headmaster. He probably didn’t send me this for the SP reward.’

As evidence, the location written on the mission was Metro City in Busan, where the Representative Selection would be taking place. Shin YuSung gave a relaxed smile as he saw where the mission was going to be held.

‘...I definitely have to participate in it.’

Moreover, his task when he got there was to patrol the city. There was no better mission for him to take if he wanted to garner the favors of its citizens.

Shin YuSung pressed the [Accept] button that was on the hologram. As he did so, it fizzled out into pixels and disappeared.

“Phew– that was really fun! I wish we kept going!”

“Huuuu... I-if we kept going... I would’ve died.”

Amy looked chipper while Sumire, on the other hand, looked like a wreck. The two began to make their way back from the pool.

Lee SiWoo supported his chin on his arm and began to mumble to himself.

“...Hmm. YuSung, you’ll be pretty busy, then. You have to get ready for the Representative Selection and also go on city patrol at the same time...”

Amy’s ears perked up at his words.

“Oh, the city patrol! Right, right~ Team Leader-nim, you’re going on an extracurricular activity to Metro City, yeah?! I heard EunAh is

going there, too...”

She began to snicker, eyebrows wriggling. Lee SiWoo looked at her, puzzled.

“Hey, YuSung just got that message. How do *you* know about it?”

“Puhaha! Information is the lifeblood of all broadcasts! There isn’t a single thing I don’t know that goes down in the school!”

Amy began boasting about herself, back straightened and hands on her hips. She seemed quite excited about the topic.

“Anyways, I’ve been thinking about this, but the combination of Team Leader-nim and EunAh sounds really interesting...”

Amy was quite friendly with her fellow classmate. Kim EunAh wasn’t the type of person who opened her heart up easily to others, but she seemed to let her guard down somewhat for Amy.

“Oh yeah, now that you mention it... You’re both in the same class, right? What kind of person is she?” Lee SiWoo asked, swinging his legs in the air above the pool chair. Amy groaned and began to think deeply on the matter.

“Uhh... EunAh? Umm, that is... sh-she’s a really great person!”

Lee SiWoo snorted as Amy slightly fudged her answer. He began to press on it further.

“How is she great?”

“Uh... she’s rough on the outside, but she’s surprisingly considerate? Ah, I guess this might only apply to me, though. Mmm... so what I’m trying to say is...”

Amy short-circuited.

Even to someone good with words like her, she was having too much

difficulty trying to describe Kim EunAh succinctly.

* * *

The waterpark was crowded.

—But only for a moment.

As the school's celebrities, Adela and Kim EunAh, walked out, the crowd split apart as if there was a forcefield around the two.

1st in the student rankings: Adela Ortensia.

2nd in the student rankings: Kim EunAh of the Shinsung group.

Kim EunAh was griping to herself—her cheeks were puffed, and sunglasses were perched on her face.

“Lee ChaeHyun. I should’ve taken the chance to thoroughly beat her up...”



Adela didn't show any reaction to the other girl's grumbling and walked on, white dress swaying in the breeze. An exotic atmosphere exuded from her, seeming to transform the waterpark in Busan into the seas of Milano.

—A mysterious transfer student from Italy.

Adela talked to Kim EunAh in Korean, not even turning around to look at the other girl.

“It was just a test.”

A frosty voice.

From the start, Adela wasn't the sort of person who cared about other people's issues. Since she was little, the only thing that she had pursued was strength—nothing else interested her.

Kim EunAh twirled a lock of hair around her finger, a cool expression on her face.

“...Is that so?”

She began to ask a question to Adela, voice dry as a desert.

“Even if she brings up my comatose brother?”

Step step.

For a while, the only sounds echoing throughout the area were the shuffle of footsteps from the two women. Even as they both wore expressionless faces, the atmosphere had grown much heavier.

The period of silence only lasted a moment.

“...Hm. Well, don't strain yourself. I thought that was how you'd respond. And...”

Kim EunAh brushed off Adela's nonexistent reply as if it was no big deal.

It was a very odd reaction, considering her fiery personality. Instead, Kim EunAh looked at the item in her hand and smirked.

“I already had my revenge.”

Kim EunAh spun the Pocket around her index finger. The Pocket, just barely hooked around her finger, was not her own.

“See this?”

A Pocket performed various functions:

It was your student ID at Gaon, it made video calls for you, there was a dimensional pocket connected to it, your SP points were directly fed into the device by the Academy, and it also acted as a debit card. There were countless other functions to a Pocket aside from those.

“She’ll be suffering for a while, now that she’s missing this. How dare she cross me?”

The owner of the Pocket hanging from her finger was none other than Lee ChaeHyun. Kim EunAh had managed to take revenge for her brother being badmouthed after the test had ended.

It truly showed the extent to which she would hold a grudge.

Adela sighed.

“Did that make you feel better?”

“Ah~ better?”

The corner of Kim EunAh’s mouth went up at the other girl’s question.

“It felt damn good, you know?”

* * *

Right before going back to the Academy...

It was the last night that they would spend in the theme park.

Shin YuSung was currently holding his body in a stance in a forest far from the hotel, honing his breath. It was a familiar enough process to him, even if it looked like an eccentric habit to other people.

It was his nightly training.

Shin YuSung concentrated on the mana spreading out from his hands.

‘...Contain as much mana as possible, using as little concentration as possible.’

This was the teaching the Fist King had left him for the fourth form.

But the fourth form seemed difficult, even to Shin YuSung, who was blessed with a physique from the gods.

If he heightened his concentration, his widespread senses would dissipate, and if he lowered his concentration, the contained mana would dissipate.

It had been an hour since he had started his training.

Blue mana was undulating around his form.

Woosh.

He had succeeded in containing all of the mana he had released from his body. However, this was where the real challenge began.

‘Slowly begin releasing more mana... ’

If he wanted to perform the fourth form successfully, he had to raise the intensity of his mana while maintaining his senses.

The problem was that the difficulty of controlling one’s mana grew exponentially as more of it was released.

Vmm vmm!

He increased the output. The blue mana around Shin YuSung's form began to vibrate; it was on the verge of losing its form.

“Keuk...”

The mana suddenly began to strain his body.

Shin YuSung clenched his jaw as an incredible amount of pain swept through him.

Flash!

The mana that Shin YuSung had contained scattered into the wind. The pain had broken his concentration, and he had failed in performing the technique.

‘As I thought, I still can’t... ’

Shin YuSung clenched his fist, then looked up at the moon. Shin YuSung had left the care of the Fist King and had left his home. The location of his fights had changed, and so had his opponents.

But the moon in the sky looked exactly the same as the one that had shined down on him on the Martial Spirits' Mountain.

‘...The moon and the Martial Spirits' Mountain... ’

Shin YuSung slowly leafed through one of his memories from years past. It was as clear in his mind as the moon that lit the night sky.

[Why aren't you sleeping? This is the first break you've had in a while.]

The Fist King asked this to Shin YuSung, all the while digging a finger into his ear. The boy was looking outside the cavern entrance at the moon with a dazed expression on his face.

[I can't sleep.]

[...A-hum. Why so?]

—A bonfire and a warm blanket.

—A cave that shielded him from the elements.

That was the equivalent of a five-star hotel on Martial Spirits' Mountain, but Shin YuSung continued to stare up at the moon.

[...I don't know.]

Seeing the boy's wilted figure, the Fist King clicked his tongue and stood up from the blanket. He began to stare at him with wide, unblinking eyes, cradling his chin with his worn and torn hands as if he were a dainty maiden.

[Is it because you failed the training?]

The Fist King's words were right on the money.

Shin YuSung had failed in the training that the Fist King had given him, which was why the rest period he had gotten the day after hadn't appealed to him at all. The Fist King finally dropped his exaggerated pose at the boy's listless demeanor and began to scratch his head.

[...Well, it happens. But still, you little brat, is there any reason for you to be so depressed because of one failure?]

Shin YuSung's eyes were still affixed to the moon in the sky as if it was calling out to him. It may have been the case that he was never looking at the moon in the first place.

[I want... to become stronger.]

Shin YuSung had a goal.

Due to this goal, he endured the martial Spirits' Mountain's harsh training. The greatest revenge he could enact upon the Shin-oh family that had abandoned him was to prove that even someone with an F-

rank Trait could become the strongest hunter in the world.

And Shin YuSung also wanted to get stronger for the Fist King, who had taken him in, for the man's reputation and for himself.

Just as this goal was a great motivator for him, it was also what was causing Shin YuSung to be so anxious.

Whenever he failed, whenever he was resting because he was tired, Shin YuSung was afraid that someone would end up surpassing him.

The Fist King saw this state of Shin YuSung as very unfortunate.

[...Brat, you're worried?]

The Fist King's voice was kind.

Only then did Shin YuSung tear his gaze away from the moon and to his master. He nodded.

[I am.]

Yu WonHak had always seen Shin YuSung as a child who had matured too quickly for his age. But at times like these, he couldn't help but think of the boy as someone of his rightful age.

[YuSung-ah. If you want to become stronger...]

The Fist King had approached Shin YuSung at some point and was petting the boy's head.

[You have to take a break sometimes.]

—Rare words of comfort from his master.

Shin YuSung really liked the warmth coming from the man's calloused hands.

[But... isn't Master the one who told me to do my best every day?]

Spirits lifted, Shin YuSung asked the older man a question, laughing. Yu WonHak scratched his head.

[Tch, not a single cute bone in your body. Yeah. What I wanted to say is... you need to loosen up your shoulders every once in a while.]

[Now that you say it like that... I think I know what you're trying to tell me.]

Shin YuSung smiled.

The boy was pushing his limits to the point where the Fist King was getting worried. Due to this, he constantly pushed past those limits and grew stronger, but in exchange, he had never had a proper moment to relax before.

The greatest effort and passion didn't always bear the greatest results. Sometimes, as his master had told him, the solution was to take it easy.

Shin YuSung, at age 17, decided to believe in those words.

‘...Relax.’

Shin YuSung renewed his stance with a new resolve in his head.

Fwoom.

He then tried his best to erase the desperation in his heart. All that was left was peace and tranquility. The more desperate he was, the more unnecessary power he used, leading to a negative effect on his mana control.

‘—And peace.’

Shin YuSung easily recalled the break that he had experienced earlier that day. It was noisy and rambunctious, but it wasn't bad. No, it was tremendously fun.

Woosh.

Mana began to flow around Shin YuSung once more, but something was different.

‘The least amount of concentration possible. The largest amount of mana possible. And then... ’

The only difference was his change of heart, but even his breathing had adjusted itself; the mana flowing around him had also shifted slightly.

An unknowable confidence began to surge from Shin YuSung’s body.

“More!”

Flash!

A blue light began to fluctuate inside his body, then covered Shin YuSung in a protective veil.

Sssst! Flash!

The light then disappeared. Even so, Shin YuSung stared at his body with a bewildered expression on his face.

“I actually... succeeded.”

It had been three years since he had learned the third form.

Even if it was an instant, he had finally succeeded in using the Battle God Style’s fourth form.

Chapter 41

A day since the end of the test...

Shin YuSung entered the classroom, as he always did. But the reaction that the F Class students had towards him was quite different than usual.

“Hey, YuSung’s here!”

“F Class’s here~ who are you eating lunch with today?”

“I heard he packs his own lunch.”

It seemed like Sumire’s homemade lunches caused a misunderstanding to spread in the class. Every time someone mentioned Shin YuSung, someone else jumped into the conversation to pitch their own two cents.

“What, is he good at cooking, too?”

“There really isn’t anything he can’t do, huh?”

Before, his classmates looked at him from a distance with reverent eyes. Now, it seemed like they all wanted to get closer to him.

The leadership that he had shown during the test and his efforts that brought F Class to victory had captivated his classmates.

And among them, Renia had long become a complete devotee to him.

“I’ve cleaned up a place a good view for you, Shin YuSung-nim.”

Renia clasped the hem of her school uniform skirt with one hand as if she were a noblewoman from the Middle Ages and gave a refined

curtsy at his arrival.

“Fufu, and what brings you here?”

The desk that Renia had prepared for him was a window seat. Sunlight streamed down onto it in a pleasing manner. Someone had placed a beautiful flower in a glass bottle on the surface.

“Does Your Highness know the meaning of the ragras in flower language?”

“U-um, let’s see...”

Shin YuSung laughed in a strained manner at Renia’s ostentatious greeting. Lee SiWoo, who was standing right next to them, only added more onto it.

“YuSung-ah. It means gratitude for your kindness. I chose it myself.”

“And I brought the glass. We put a lot of effort into it!”

Renia stuck a thumb up, reverting back to her original speech pattern. Her healthy, tanned-looking skin and exotic looks were a result of her Australian origins. However, her mannerisms were completely Korean.

“Thank you. Though the credit should be given to all of you.”

Shin YuSung didn’t fail to show humility, even when he had performed such a huge part in the test.

“His personality... also a pass,” Renia mumbled to herself, as if drunk on his humble words.

“What’s he passing?” Lee SiWoo asked, eyes narrowed. Renia looked at the boy and answered him in a joking tone.

“Ehe! Requirements to be my husband, of course!”



“...Ugh. You’re insane.”

Shin YuSung was practically a religious entity in F Class at this point.

“He’s going to participate in the Representative Selection this time, right? You know, our family’s pretty big! I’ll tell them to vote for you!”

“Whoa, really? YuSung is gonna be in the selections? I’ll vote for him too, then!”

“Of course you will. He’s the pride and joy of F Class.”

A lot of interest started aiming itself towards Shin YuSung. As a consequence, however, Sumire couldn’t get any closer to him.

“Um, e-excuse me...”

Sumire’s mutters didn’t reach Shin YuSung at all. Even when she tried to approach him as usual, the human wall between them was too dense. But Sumire did not give up. In fact, she made some sort of pledge to herself before struggling and squeezing through the gaps until she had finally reached the boy’s side.

“Sh-Shin YuSung-ssi! H-here...”

What she had handed to him were her notes from class, all neatly organized by Sumire herself. Everything was handwritten in her neat writing, and all of the important points were charmingly marked with a star.

“Ah, thank you, Sumire. It’s the notes you mentioned earlier, right. These are really neat.”

“Th... heehee... I-it isn’t anything much.”

The corners of Sumire’s lips were twitching in her effort to stop her laughter from seeping out. Lee SiWoo watched her do so, disgusted.

‘She really is... ’

To Lee SiWoo, the Sumire that he saw was an incredibly gloomy person. And despite seeming like a rather passive person most of the time, there was a wicked gleam in her eye whenever she looked at

Shin YuSung.

‘Hmmm... she really is gloomy.’

Sumire’s face reddened at Shin YuSung’s praise without a single idea about the thoughts Lee SiWoo was aiming towards her.

“R-really, it isn’t! Besides... this is all stuff you can learn right away! It isn’t anything special!”

Sumire’s words weren’t based entirely on humility. In reality, while Sumire’s written test scores were exemplary, she was still last in the student rankings. For the students aiming to be hunters, the Academy treated real-life experience and application as above everything else.

The most important thing needed in a hunter was strength.

It was also important to have the wisdom that one earned through study, but still less important.

Shin YuSung slowly read through the notes that Sumire had given him.

“Hey, hey, everyone, back off. YuSung is reading.”

Always quick on the uptake, Lee SiWoo deployed his scheme to make the other F Class students disperse. He and Sumire remained next to SHin YuSung.

[1-1 Hunter Classifications]

[1-4 About Dungeons and the Tower]

[1-5 Rules on Extracurricular Activities]

[1-6...]

Shin YuSung carefully searched through the table of contents, then flipped through the pages. He eventually found the information he

wanted to take a look at.

[1–9 Extracurricular Patrol]

Lee SiWoo, who was also reading the notebook, nodded his head as he figured out what the other boy was doing.

“Because of the Metro City patrol, right?”

“Come to think of it... you’ll be working with a city that large... e-even so, I’ll teach you all of the theory!”

Sumire, with great effort, kindled her passion. It was a good opportunity for her to be of help to Shin YuSung in the areas of theory and textbook notes.

“Sounds good, Sumire. I’ll be in your care—my extracurricular activity starts tomorrow.”

Sumire pulled up a chair.

‘S... Sitting next to Shin YuSung-ssi... ’

Sumire’s lightly cackling expression seemed happier than usual.

* * *

They had lost in the intramurals.

A Class was quiet, its mood lowered by the results.

“Guysssss~!”

But Amy didn’t just let the silence fester. She slid open the door loudly, as always, slamming it into the wall.

“It is I!!”

She was striking a bombastic pose with her hands on her hips. At her appearance, her classmates began to shower her with applause.

“You’re cool as ever!”

Amy blew kisses at the crowd in response to their cheers.

“Thank you, thank you! It has been a while, everyone!”

“Can’t you read the mood?”

Kim EunAh glared at the girl with narrowed eyes. However, this did not deter Amy from sticking herself right onto her body.

“I don’t read that kinda stuff~”

Amy looked up, eyes shining. Kim EunAh made an expression that said, “urk!”.

“Fine, whatever.”

“Hey, by the way~ what a surprise!”

Amy began to snicker, hand covering her mouth. Her eyebrows were wriggling as well.

“What?” asked Kim EunAh. She had a bad feeling about this.

Amy poked the other girl’s stomach with her finger.

“The extracurricular you’re doing with Team Leader-nim! You accepted it! Hm, you said you were going to take a break for a while~ why’d you change your mind?”

Amy looked like she was having fun.

Kim EunAh hated people who liked to gossip and people who bothered others. But weirdly enough, she couldn’t say the same for Amy, who definitely qualified for both categories.

“What? I’m just interested in him.”

“I-interested!? What part? It’s Team Leader-nim’s looks, isn’t it!?”

Amy’s eyes were shining even brighter. Kim EunAh pushed the other girl’s forehead away from herself to create some distance between the two.

“...Well, he’s in F Class, but he’s really fucking strong. That’s it.”

“Well, whatever! You have to play nice with him, you hear?”

“I-I got it. Get off me.”

Kim EunAh just barely managed to get the leech in the form of a girl off of her. She then turned her head towards the window and looked at the light streaming through it, chin propped up by her hand.

‘...Metro City.’

The pride and joy of Busan, as well as the location in which the Representative Selections were going to be held. But those were not the reasons why the city was special to Kim EunAh.

—Metro City was where her brother’s hospital was situated. She had constantly been visiting him and the city since he had fallen into a coma.

She could now visit the city while patrolling it. There was no reason for Kim EunAh to refuse the offer.

‘...I’ll be seeing you soon.’

Kim EunAh, still looking out of the window, was unconsciously smiling to herself.

* * *

Metro City’s high-rise...

The man wearing glasses was pointing at the glowing blue portal and rambling like a child.

“Isn’t this incredible? This is the first time that our nation has ever implemented the International Competition system! This is just a portion of it, of course, but... all I need is time!”

Mei Lin, wearing her signature cheongsam, strode towards him; her high heels clacked on the floor.

“...Don’t worry. If the system works properly, the Association won’t skimp on providing any manpower.”

Mei Lin carefully inspected the portal, continuing to talk all the while.

“Mr. President is also watching the Representative Selections this time around.”

“Th-the Association President himself!”

The man with glasses wiped the cold sweat running down his face with a handkerchief. The thought of one of the legends of Korea, Kang YuChan, watching filled his body with nervousness. Mei Lin looked at the man, expressionless.

“...Which is why failure will not be tolerated.”

“U-understood! We will go all-out in the implementation for the Selections!”

He performed an exaggerated salute at Mei Lin like a soldier. She herself was standing perfectly upright. Using only her chin, she indicated towards the portal.

“Since it’s already activated, do you mind if I try it myself?”

“Yes! It’s all ready!” he replied confidently.

Mei Lin slowly put her hand inside the portal.

Woosh!

Her body was sucked into it as if she were entering a dungeon.

Flash! Wooosh!

Mei Lin opened her eyes as if nothing had happened. As soon as she entered the portal, the office that she had just been in was nowhere to be seen; in its place, a massive, empty city lay before her eyes.

“How is it? It’s 100% virtual space, but everything is exactly the same as the real thing!

The man had followed in behind her and was making a huge fuss. Mei Lin touched the dirt surrounding the trees lining the roads. A soft texture lingered at her fingertips. The city was a lively panorama. Mei Lin gathered mana in her index finger and cut the back of her hand.

Bzzt!

Instead of blood spilling from the wound, holographic pixels spit out from it.

“It’s perfect.”

She nodded her head stoically. The man spread out his arms in a grand gesture as if inviting her to take a look around the area.

“This is a place where no one gets hurt, no matter what sort of battle takes place in it!”

Like he had said, it was a virtual space created using the latest in portal technology and artifact mana. If one received a mortal wound, they would be ejected out of the portal, but that was it. No one got hurt.

“Choosing our company for this job was the greatest decision that the Hunter Association could have made.”

Mei Lin scanned her surroundings at his words.

A large, empty city.

—A desperate battle for survival between the elite hunter academy students in pursuit of the number 1 spot.

‘There’s no doubt this will be fun.’

Of course, out of the countless students taking part in it, there was only one that Mei Lin was keeping an eye out for.

‘...Shin YuSung.’

A boy that the Fist King, Yu WonHak, and the Association president, Kang YuChan, were watching. A newcomer who streaked across the sky like a comet. Shin YuSung had managed to perform a first-event double raid in a dungeon raid that the Association had hosted.

Despite all of this, the Trait that he had been born with was a mere F-rank one. Mei Lin’s interest couldn’t help but be piqued.

It was still unknown, however, whether Shin YuSung would win in the Representative Selections.

‘Adela.’

There was an opponent of overwhelming strength among the first years of Gaon Academy, who had claimed the title of the strongest before Shin YuSung had even transferred to the school.

‘Who will win between the two?’

Mei Lin’s mouth formed a perfect curve, showing her anticipation.

Chapter 42

Metro Tower, piercing the skies...

The Association was in charge of managing hunters at that iconic location in Metro City.

‘...So this is Metro Tower.’

Shin YuSung entered the building, wearing his Gaon Academy uniform. A woman who was waiting in the lobby for him waved her hand at her.

“Hey! Over here!”

—Exuberant laughter.

The woman was wearing neat, interview-style formal attire. She greeted Shin YuSung kindly.

“Wow~ so you’re patrolling the city, even at your age. I bet you have good grades, huh? Marvelous! Oh, right, I should introduce myself first!:

The woman stopped her excited rambling to point at her nametag.

[Rank 3 Hunter Yu AeRi]

She was a rather skilled hunter from the Hunter Association who could defeat a rank 3 boss monster on her own.

“I’m Shin YuSung, the one who accepted the request.”

Yu AeRi smiled at his formal greeting.

“This isn’t some sort of stuffy event; it’s your extracurricular activity. There’s no need to address me in such a stiff manner. Loosen up~ just call me noona*.”

She looked at Shin YuSung with a worried expression on her face.

“...But I’m kind of worried about leaving this job to students. You’re just too~ adorable. What if a villain appears and decides to snatch you up?”

Her thoughts were all over the place. Shin YuSung was skilled enough to have already defeated rank 4 monsters, despite his age. He was much stronger than Yu AeRi, an Association hunter.

However, she didn’t know this and kept chattering excitedly.

“If you’re really~ scared, how about I stick close to you? I know I don’t look like much, but I can easily take care of a rank 3 boss monster on my own.”

To Yu AeRi, ignoring the stuffy mission assigned to them, Shin YuSung was her precious new junior. He was like a newly-sprouted plant from the ground. She treated him in a very friendly manner as a result.

‘...A rank 3 boss?’

But Shin YuSung was puzzled by her words, which were completely different from what the Fist King had told him.

[At the Hunter Association, YuSung-ah, you aren’t one worth your salt unless you can defeat at least a rank 5 boss by yourself!]

In front of him, Yu AeRi was recounting her tales against a mere rank 3 boss.

‘As I thought... Master’s standards are... ’

Yu AeRi clapped her hands loudly just as Shin YuSung was beginning to lose himself in his thoughts regarding the Fist King.

“Oh, right! You’re a Gaon student, that means you’ve defeated monsters during your exams, right? Which one was the highest rank one you defeated? Rank 2? *Gasp*, maybe rank 3?” she asked, curiosity written on her face.

Shin YuSung kept his reply short.

“A rank 4 boss.”

“...Huh?”

Yu AeRi was bewildered by the completely unexpected answer.

“Rank 4? A-are you messing with me?” she asked, stuttering.

Shin YuSung smiled shakily. She looked up his name on her Pocket.

Voom!

His various achievements showed up on the hologram. Among those were records of him defeating the rank 4 bosses, the Dullahan and the lich.

“Uh, uh...”

Yu AeRi stared at the hologram blankly. Then, she began to mumble in a quiet voice, face bright red.

“Urk, forget everything I just said...”

* * *

The reception area of Metro Tower...

Yu AeRi had just concluded her 10-minute lesson on patrolling and began to talk to Shin YuSung in a much calmer manner than before.

“...Seriously, forget my behavior from earlier. I think I got too worked up because I hadn’t met any students in a long time.”

The boy gave her a faint smile in lieu of an answer. Yu AeRi made a conflicted face.

“...You’re telling me that someone this adorable won against a rank 4 boss? You really can’t judge a book by its cover.”

“Is the lesson over?”

“Yeah, feel free to leave. Tell your late partner the details.”

Shin YuSung slowly walked himself to the outside of Metro Tower.

As expected, there was a high-end limousine waiting at the entrance of the building.

Beep beep!

The limousine honked its horn to catch his attention.

Slüide!

The limousine door did not open outwards, but instead swung upwards. In the limo was Kim EunAh, who was accompanying him for patrol duty.

‘...So you were waiting for me.’



Her attitude was rather irreverent, as she had skipped out on the lesson, but Kim EunAh was the beloved granddaughter of the Shinsung group's president.

There was no need to make a fuss about it, though, considering how influential the Shinsung group was as Korea's greatest enterprise.

“Yo~”

Kim EunAh lifted her palm towards Shin YuSung. Her legs were crossed over each other in an unseemly manner.

“All done?”

Shin YuSung nodded instead of answering her, to which she indicated to the seat in front of her with her chin.

But Shin YuSung only quietly stared at her.

—A beat.

Kim EunAh scrunched up her forehead, as if annoyed with the whole thing.

“What are you doing? Get in.”

Kim EunAh usually didn't walk anywhere, even if it was a hair's breadth away. No, it wasn't limited to walking. Aside from her school activities, her bodyguard and secretary did all of her work and chores for her. She truly was the modern princess.

‘A completely different class from mine.’

Shin YuSung, who had been raised on Martial Spirits' Mountain as an orphaned child, was living in a different world from her.

“Young Miss. We will be departing.”

The bodyguard in their twenties said, glancing their way. Kim EunAh nodded, used to the form of address.

“Okay. Let's leave, quickly.”

Vroom-!

At her permission, the driver started up the engine of the limousine. It was the sort of high-end vehicle that didn't shake, even at high speeds.

"...Hm."

Kim EunAh crossed her arms and glanced towards Shin YuSung in a haughty manner. Then, she began to talk to him.

"Hey, you're participating in the Representative Selection, right?" she asked. She seemed interested.

"Yes, that's correct."

His first goal was the Selection.

Then it was the International Competition.

The process so far, to Shin YuSung, was just like climbing a set of stairs.

The Selections were a step that he had to climb over to reach the top, where he would become the strongest hunter in the world.

Kim EunAh began to mutter to herself at his reply.

"Then you'll be pitted against Adela, huh? Hah, a fight between an F-rank and an S-rank..."

First in the student rankings...

Adela Ortensia.

Shin YuSung had heard her name enough to make his ears fall off ever since he had been enrolled in Gaon. However, he had never personally gauged her skill even once.

'...First place in Gaon.'

If one was first place in Gaon Academy, it meant that they were first place in Korea. Shin YuSung was curious about Adela's skills.

‘Come to think of it... ’

His gaze turned towards Kim EunAh. Despite her personality, she was a skilled hunter who was ranked second in the student rankings.

“Do you have some time after your extracurriculars?”

Kim EunAh paused at his question. She mulled over his words slowly, finally coming to a conclusion and keeping the smile threatening to stretch across her mouth at bay.

“Hah~ man, this always happens. It's such an issue.”

Kim EunAh looked excited by Shin YuSung's query.

“Sure. I already know what you're going to say, but I'll hear you out. Why are you asking for my time?”

She asked him excitedly, words dripping with arrogance. Shin YuSung gave her a succinct reply.

“Spar with me.”

“...Huh?”

Kim EunAh froze up. It seemed like his response was much different than the one she anticipated from him.

“...Y-you want to fight me? So suddenly?”

Her reaction showed surprise at his words.

But Shin YuSung continued to show his sincerity.

“I want to check the strength of the rankers before I participate in the Selection.”

Kim EunAh swallowed as his eyes bored into hers.

‘A spar... out of nowhere? I won’t lose to an F-rank, sure, but... ’

Kim EunAh scanned his body once again. His muscles were incredibly well-built.

‘He looks like someone who fights with his physical abilities. I can also feel a lot of mana coming from him... ’

He was completely incompatible with Kim EunAh, who couldn’t fine-tune her control over her electricity. Shin YuSung, in her eyes, seemed way too strong for an F-rank.

‘He’s already third in the rankings, too... ’

Kim EunAh looked composed on the outside, but her back was drenched in a cold sweat, and her brain was running around in circles.

What if, just what if...

What would happen in the absolutely minuscule chance—as minuscule a chance as lightning striking you on a clear day—that she lost to him?

As her thoughts reached that point, Kim EunAh turned her head towards the window to evade his gaze.

‘...Shit, wh-what should I do? Should I just fight him?’

Kim EunAh’s strong confidence prevented her from admitting to herself that she was scared. After mulling over it for a while, she managed to come up with a good reason as to why she couldn’t spar with him.

“Hey, what’s on the schedule after extracurriculars are done?” she said to her bodyguard, prompting Shin YuSung to listen in.

“It’s Metro Hospital.”

“That so? I guess the spar is out of the question, then.”

Kim EunAh nodded, a proud expression on her face. The limousine stopped as they reached their patrol area.

The driver opened the door of the limo. Kim EunAh looked at Shin YuSung and give a high-pitched laugh.

“Got it? Give up. I’m busy.”

Two bodyguards were already waiting outside the limousine with parasols in their hands. Kim EunAh took out sunglasses from her Pocket and put them on her face, all the while striding confidently out of the car.

Kim EunAh looked over the bodyguards with a distasteful expression on her face, then began to complain.

“Hey. I’m going on patrol. Why are you following me? So cumbersome.”

Despite being the words from Kim EunAh herself, the bodyguards showed outright disapproval at the thought of leaving her alone. It was because they couldn’t imagine the rage that the president of the Shinsung group, Kim SeokHan, would express if Kim EunAh was somehow hurt.

“B-but...”

“But what?”

But she stood firm.

“Are you looking down on my skills?”

Bzz bzz!

Static began to erupt from Kim EunAh’s body as she began to show her annoyance. There was not one person in the Shinsung group who

could stop her if she began to stubbornly insist on having her way.

“...I understand.”

The bodyguards ended up backing off.

Shin YuSung looked at Kim EunAh.

‘...What a thorny person.’

It wasn’t a big deal, actually, since she was fairly polite to him, but he began to remember something that the Fist King had said to him before.

[There were always some young’uns who were entitled and didn’t know their place, even back when I was on active duty.]

A hunter who was triumphant in every mission he took part in and was on the road to success... Mind’s Eye Yu HyungJin—he began to pick a fight with the Fist King without a shred of fear in him during the time when they were both climbing the Tower.

[This old man is the party leader instead of me? I can’t accept this!]

—A youthful man in his twenties.

Even so, he had rebelled against the greatest hunter in Korea, the Fist King. When Shin YuSung had first heard of this, he couldn’t hold back his curiosity about it.

[S-so what did you do?]

The Fist King picked his ear with his finger at the boy’s question.

[I pulverized him until he was practically dead. One doesn’t gain any respect towards others until they get beaten up, you know.]

Truly a bone-chilling story.

“Hey, what are you just standing around for? Let’s go.”

Shin YuSung laughed weakly as he watched Kim EunAh make a ‘come here’ motion with her finger.

‘...EunAh should never meet my master.’

*Noona is a title used by men for women who are older than them, but it’s only saved for younger women, and between people who are relatively close to each other. It’s also the title used by men to refer to their older sisters.

Chapter 43

Afternoon in Metro City...

Kim EunAh and Shin YuSung were walking around the city in their Gaon Academy uniforms. They could, naturally, hear the citizens murmuring to each other as they did so.

“Whoa, those are Gaon students!”

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen one!”

Their gazes were reverent.

To the ordinary people, hunters were being who conquered the Tower to spread previously-unknown knowledge and skills to the general public, and they also protected the world from the threat posed by dungeons and gates.

Of course, the hunters of then were heavily intertwined with the practice of capitalism, but even there, they were playing the role of a figure to be idolized by the common person.

“Whoaa! Hyung*! You’re a hunter!? That’s so cool!”

A bright-eyed young boy approached them. Kim EunAh scrunched up her face as if this annoyed her.

“Who’s this kid?”

“Me? I’m! Baek Sungil! 5 years old!”

Her harsh reaction had no effect on the child, however.

‘...Five years old.’

Shin YuSung thought for a moment as he heard the boy's age. Then, he delicately patted the boy's head.

"Do you think hunters are cool?"

The boy's eyes got even brighter at the question. He fiercely nodded his head.

"They're super cool! Hunters have weapons! And, uh... they kill monsters!"

His spiel was finished. His attention soon turned towards Kim EunAh.

"Oh yeah, pretty noona. Do you have a gun and a sword?"

Kim EunAh's mouth twitched when he called her pretty.

Even someone as haughty as her seemed to genuinely be touched by the child's honest compliments.

"Me? I don't have either of those things."

She answered him in a good mood. The child continued to pelt her with questions.

"No way! How do you kill monsters, then? Monsters are super ultra-strong."

Baek Sungil was at that age where he was curious about everything and anything. In lieu of a verbal response, Kim EunAh summoned blue lightning from her hand.

Bzt! Zaap!

"With this."

The boy covered his mouth with both hands at the display of power.

"That's sick..." he mumbled, eyes full of awe.

Kim EunAh continued to talk, though she was pretending as if she wasn't affected by his words.



“I guess... my Trait is a standout even in Korea, after all.”

Shin YuSung watched the two, entertained. Kim EunAh and the five-year-old child got along better than one would've thought.

‘...She’s humoring the kid really well.’

The thought that the two might have similar mental ages popped up in his head. Just then, the child asked them something rather shocking.

“Is noona dating hyung, then?”

His gaze switched back and forth from Shin YuSung to Kim EunAh. Kim EunAh creased her forehead.

“What!? M-me?” she yelled, alarmed. Her face was shrouded in disgust. The kid looked disappointed in this.

“Aw, why won’t you marry, though? Why?”

“And why should I marry *him*?”

Kim EunAh narrowed her eyes in staunch refusal.

“Because you’re both hunters! And hyung looks pretty!”

He answered as if it was obvious, eyes glittering.

It was a simple thought process that a young child would have.

But Kim EunAh, who didn’t know the meaning of failure, didn’t give in to him, even despite the fact that her opponent was a five-year-old.

“Hey, brat. That has nothing to do with marriage. Got it?”

She was teaching the child this in full sincerity. A rare sight was beginning to unfold between a 17-year-old and a five-year-old.

“Then what is it?”

However, Kim EunAh became stuck by the boy’s earnest question.

“U-um, so marriage is...”

She couldn’t think of a way to describe it, no matter how much she rolled the idea around in her head. Kim EunAh sent Shin YuSung a signal while the child wasn’t looking.

That was her call for help.

Shin YuSung grinned and called for her.

“Hey, EunAh?”

Kim EunAh took a moment to glare at the child, frustrated about the fact that he had pushed her back. She then turned away from him in an arrogant manner.

* * *

Metro City was incredibly peaceful. The reality was that there were no traces of serious threats like gates and villains in the city, nor were there even small incidents such as car accidents.

Their patrol was due to end in two hours.

Kim EunAh, unable to hold her boredom in, let out a giant yawn while covering her mouth with her hand. She then began to talk to Shin YuSung.

“...How about a cup of coffee?”

She pointed at a café that they had seen earlier, but Shin YuSung firmly refused the offer.

“We’re still in the middle of patrol.”

The taste of coffee, to Shin YuSung, was similar to the taste of the special medicine that the Fist King had made for him using herbs. He did not want to drink coffee in a world where he could be drinking banana-flavored milk instead—especially considering that coffee had no strengthening properties, unlike the medicine.

Kim EunAh didn't back down but instead kept pressing him.

“Hey, this is a part of our job too, you know! What happens if a gate suddenly appears in that café?”

It seemed like she was quite adamant about drinking some coffee.

“My intuition is pretty good, you know?”

Shin YuSung eventually gave in to her stubborn reasoning and began to make his way towards the café.

‘It should be fine to take just a moment’s break.’

Right when they were approaching the building...

Ring! Voom—!

A sound erupted from both of their Pockets, and then a hologram appeared in the air.

《Warning》

—Gate appearance, Danger rank 4

—Type: [Dungeon]

—Dungeon Name: Nest of Monstrous Birds

—Location: 426th Street Café, Suite 152

Kim EunAh truly had good intuition.

Weewooooo--!!

An ear-splitting siren rang throughout Metro City through the pre-installed speakers as they delivered the details of the emergency situation.

[This is a city-wide announcement in Metro City]

[There is a gate currently forming on 426th Street. Civilians in the area, please evacuate the area as quickly as possible.]

Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh...

No further explanation was needed for the two Sevens.

Tup!

Shin YuSung pumped mana into his legs and began to run at incredible speeds. Kim EunAh used her own Trait, Electricity.

Bzz! Bzzt!

Kim EunAh, surrounded by electricity, disappeared in an instant. Her speed was comparable to a momentary flash of light. She covered a great distance in that short period of time, but as she looked ahead of her, she discovered that Shin YuSung was overtaking her.

‘What, he’s faster than me?’ she thought.

To her eyes, Shin YuSung’s speed was not the product of a Trait but was pure physical ability and mana control.

Shin YuSung, at the age of 17, was performing feats that active-duty hunters thought were impossible to do.

‘Just who is he, anyways?’

[The Gate Bureau will repeat the announcement. Currently, the rift on 426th Street is growing larger. Citizens in the area...]

The bureau's announcement rang throughout the city once again.

"It-it's actually happening..."

Kim EunAh, who had been running until then, stopped in her tracks. She could see the rift, and next to it, Shin YuSung, who had already arrived at the location.

—A purple portal that led to an endless void.

She began to shout in joy at her correct prediction.

"Hey, hey, hey! I told you it would happen, right!?"

But unlike the ecstatic Kim EunAh, Shin YuSung was set with a serious expression on his face.

"Good job. Now, let's get ready to fight."

The gate that had opened was rank 4.

The opponents were around the same level as the rank 4 bosses that Shin YuSung had experienced no trouble defeating up to that point. Even so, he didn't let his guard down.

'...Let's close the gate in a way that causes as little harm to the city as possible.'

Shin YuSung was keeping in mind both the safety of the city and a way to conquer the gate.

Crack! Craaaack!

The sound of something shattering filled the air. The purple rift grew larger.

"Caw, kraaw?"

A mysterious cry came from the gate. Right after, something peeked

its head out of the rift.

—A massive head.

—A large, yellow beak.

The creature was at least two meters large.

“Caaaaw! Kraaaaw!”

The monster bird tilted its head upwards and yelled towards the sky, then began to walk out of the gate.

“Hah! All this fuss for one bird?” Kim EunAh laughed confidently.

As if to mock her, more birds began pouring out of the gate.

“Kraw?”

“Caw!”

There were suddenly five monster birds.

Kim EunAh, dumbfounded, began to shout at the gate.

“Hey, why the hell won’t they stop appearing? Is this really a rank 4 gate? Just go and send out a boss monster at this rate!”

“Caw!”

“Kraww!?”

The birds tilted their heads at the girl. And as if her words had planted a suggestion in the gate, the rift turned from purple to red.

Boooooom, boom!

The ground shook from a large quake, and a metallic beak appeared

from the gate. Seeing that, Kim EunAh immediately grew pale.

“...P-Pocket. Analyze info.”

* * *

= = = = =

Name – Silver Beak

Origin Dungeon(s) – Nest of Monstrous Birds

Danger Level – Rank 4 Boss

Classification – Monster

Info – The feathers around its body are as hard as steel. Due to the weight of those feathers, it cannot fly in the air.

Details – The Silver Beak’s feathers have high defensive ability and resistances to certain attributes.

= = = = =

“Fucking hell... what are the odds?!”

Kim EunAh grimaced in frustration. If the information on the hologram was true, then the Silver Beak, with its elemental resistance, was a horrendous match-up with her. She bit her lip.

‘...This is.’

Calling this situation unlucky would be a misnomer.

The chances of running into a gate in a city of that size was less likely than getting hit by lightning on a clear day. And on top of that, the boss that appeared just happened to have an effective match-up against her.

‘...Really dangerous.’

Boom boom boom!

The Silver Beak turned towards Kim EunAh. Its entire body had completely left the gate.

”Caaaaaaaaw!”

A wail tore itself out of the monster’s gaping maw. Kim EunAh, instead of getting scared, steeled her nerves and strengthened the output of her electricity.

Bzz! Bzzzzzt!

She was a hunter representing her school who was sent to protect the citizens of the city. Even if the fight was a bad match-up, she had no intention of backing down.

“You think I’ll panic just because you’re running your mouth?”

Shin YuSung did not expect the sense of responsibility that Kim EunAh was displaying. She had prioritized the safety of the citizens over her own, even in a situation where she could lose her life to the boss monster.

That wasn’t something that someone with an ordinary amount of courage could do.

Shin YuSung recalled something that the Fist King had told him before.

[Hm, a comrade you can trust?... You little brat. If anyone tells you that they can teach you how to differentiate one from the other, they’re scamming you. Bash their heads in.]

[But Master, you told me that you had many good comrades back in the day, right?]

When seven-year-old Shin YuSung asked the Fist King how to differentiate good comrades from others, this was how he replied:

[Well... I can at least tell who has promise and who doesn't.]

To simplify what he was saying when he meant someone with promise, he was talking about 'a hunter with great potential'.

[Please! Tell me how!]

Shin YuSung's eyes had glittered as he asked his master about the secret. The Fist King scratched his head, then replied to his disciple.

[Someone who would rather die than lose... Just like you, YuSung-ah.]

Watching Kim EunAh made those memories rush back to Shin YuSung.

"Hey, why aren't you coming at me?"

Kim EunAh looked nervous to anyone who could see her. Her body was curled up, like a cat raising its hackles. However, her finger was leisurely wagging in a gesture meant to taunt the Silver Beak.

"You scared?"

Shin YuSung snorted at the sight. For a moment, that different personality of hers reminded him of himself.

"EunAh. I'll handle the boss."

Shin YuSung walked forward, fist clenched. Kim EunAh backed off a step in response.

"What, really? By yourself? I'm okay with it, but... is-isn't that a little dangerous?"

"I'm confident I can do this. The others, I'll leave to you."

The Silver Beak took that moment to announce the start of the battle with a fierce cry.

“Kraaaw!!”

Boom boom boom boom!

The boss monster began to run towards them with its massive body. Shin YuSung lowered his stance.

“Caww!”

Right before its body was about to hit him, time stopped around Shin YuSung. Even if the monster was approaching him at high speeds, it was much too slow from his perception.

Shin YuSung began to formulate his own movements in this space of slowed perception.

‘Dodge the beak approaching my left arm.’

Shin YuSung began to spin.

The Silver Beak’s mouth firmly snapped onto thin air. Shin YuSung formed a fist with his left hand that he had just pulled back.

‘The next thing I need to do is aim for the heart.’

But that was not knowledge that he could instantaneously obtain. Shin YuSung used his Trait, Heightened Concentration, to awaken his senses.

He could feel the boss monster’s heartbeat in that slowed-down perception of time he was experiencing. All he had to do was to give everything he had to punch through the sturdy feathers.

‘I’ll finish everything in one blow!’

Shin YuSung’s fist stretched out towards the Silver Beak. Only his fist

seemed to move freely in that space of slowed-down time.

Battle God Style Third Form – Heaven Shattering Fist Strike

He had thrown out punches tens of thousands of times. The chances of making a mistake were nonexistent.

Wooosh!!

Time returned back to normal. A blue trail of light made of mana followed the path of his fist.

Baaaam!

A deafening boom erupted from the force of the attack, formed by his mana. Shin YuSung's punch made a clean hit on the Silver Beak.

Clang!!

The earth seemed to blow back from the shockwaves.

Shin YuSung had no reason to hold back as long as his opponent was a monster.

Boom! Thud!

The Silver Beak fell onto the road.

Its massive body kicked dust up into the air. His fighting style was based on the strength of his body, not his Trait.

“Wow, he defeated that... with his bare hands...”

—Genuine praise.

Kim EunAh muttered that while staring at Shin YuSung. She had seen him fight on Jewel Island as well, but the way he fought really was special.

Shin YuSung was an irregular existence that constantly defied the common sense of hunters. He was a monster that the Fist King had created who didn't need the help of his Trait to be strong.

“C-caw!”

“Kraaaw!”

The monster birds began to shriek once their leader had been taken down. Their previous confidence had completely disappeared, replaced with fear.

Kim EunAh somewhat inappropriately placed her hand on Shin YuSung's shoulder.

“It was insulting, fighting only small fry, but...”

Kim EunAh smirked as she looked at the boy. There was no need to show her full power, as Shin YuSung had already defeated the boss monster. Even so, she was a member of the Shinsung group. The one family motto that the Shinsung group's president, Kim SeokHan, had always enforced was this:

[Never forget a favor.]

Kim EunAh took out a blue-colored jewel from her Pocket as if saying it was her turn.

“You said earlier that you were curious about the strength of the ranked students, right?”

“Oh! Are you actually planning to... accept the spar after this?”

Shin YuSung's face brightened at the prospect. Kim EunAh avoided his gaze, perhaps in shame.

“N-not that, but...”

“But?”

“Adela and I are around the same strength, you know.”

Of course, that was purely her own assertion.

Kim EunAh straightened her posture and began to talk in a confident manner.

“I’ll show you myself.”

She currently looked more motivated than she ever had before.

**Hyung is a title used by men for men who are older than them, and is usually used in informal contexts. It’s also saved for those who are relatively close to each other, like noona, but children in general are more free to use these honorifics.*

Chapter 44

Kim EunAh threw a blue-colored jewel on the ground. It was a piece of dark meteorite* that called rainclouds forth into the sky. It was an expensive elemental stone, created with sorcery in workshops.

Of course, to Kim EunAh, the sole granddaughter of the president of the Shinsung group, that much was nothing but loose change to her.

Shatter!

The jewel broke into tiny pieces as it hit the ground with a sharp ‘tink’. Five monster birds were surrounding her on all sides.

“Caw...”

“Kraww!”

—But they did not approach her.

They were intimidated by the mana she was emitting. Kim EunAh began to talk casually, ignoring the monsters around her.

“Hey, do you know what standards the Association uses to classify Traits?”

“Yeah, more or less.”

YuSung had read about the classifications of Traits before in Sumire’s notes.

There were several dozen classifications if one got really specific about it, but four were considered the most important out of them all.

“The Association rates Versatility, Destructive Power, Safety, and

Potential the highest. Adela, who you're going to fight, has S-rank in all of those."

Kim EunAh's explanation was thorough. It seemed like it was due to the fact that she owed him one for the Silver Beak.

"All S-rank..."

Truly the sort of talent that was a cut above all others, even in Gaon.

On the other hand, Shin YuSung's Trait was F-rank in all classifications except for Safety. The Association had, thus, determined the value of his Trait, [Heightened Focus], as low.

"But actually, there's a hunter in Gaon whose Destructive Power and Potential is higher than Adela's, with both evaluated at S+ rank."

After saying so, Kim EunAh laughed.

Pshhhh!!

Rain suddenly began to pour from the sky.

The dark meteorite* that Kim EunAh had shattered summoned the rainclouds.

"Yep, that's me."

Kim EunAh had a confident expression on her face.

Of course, her Safety was ranked F, which demoted her overall assessment to A-rank. However, there was no question that her Trait's Destructive Power and Potential were the highest in the academy.

"Then let's see what she's made of."

Shin YuSung, trusting in her words, moved to a safe location. Kim EunAh stomped on the ground with her left foot, then pulled up all of the mana in her body upwards.

Boom! Zzzt!

Blue lightning was crackling along Kim EunAh's body. A sphere of concentrated lightning violently sparked in her right hand.

Bzz! Bzzzt!

“Krawww!”

The monster birds, sensing that something was amiss, began to run at her. Kim EunAh grasped the lightning in her hand.

Flash! Roar! Boom!!

Lightning struck all throughout the shadowed streets. For an instant, the asphalt was lit up by the fierce assault. By the time the darkness from the clouds hanging over the streets managed to completely swallow up the street once more, it was already over.

Kim EunAh had created the natural phenomenon known as ‘lightning’ with her own mana.

“...Heh.”

It was an unbelievable scale of power for a student.

Kim EunAh turned her back to the charred-black monster birds to face Shin YuSung.

“This is the true power of a ranker. We hold back during tests.”

Shin YuSung was impressed by her lightning display.

‘...So this is the second-strongest student of Gaon.’

The destructive force of her skills was a sight to behold.

‘However... ’

That only extended to her Destructive Power.

Destructive Power was not everything in a fight.

Kim EunAh's Trait looked prone to coming across the danger of hitting her own allies. Its accuracy also seemed low.

'I'm sure even more flaws will begin to show in a close-combat match.'

More than anything, the activation time required for her skill was too slow. No matter how fast the lightning itself was, it was easy to handle if it had a long activation time. Of course, her Trait also had an advantage to it that could overthrow those disadvantages.

—An electricity element, which was rare.

Kim EunAh was able to use an element that was near-impossible to guard against both in a wide area and long distance.

'...It would be an incredible ability, so long as her teammates cover her weak spots.'

Shin YuSung had managed to calmly dissect the multitudes of information that he had gotten from observing just one fight done by Kim EunAh. Seeing that, the girl in question narrowed her eyes.

"...Hm. Hey, you. You're burning a hole in my head. Are you that scared of me?"

Kim EunAh herself was in a better mood from her own prowess. Her self-congratulatory display was evidence that she had a somewhat pure side to her, befitting her age.

'EunAh will be a huge help if she participates in the International Competition.'

But those thoughts never left his mouth. To Shin YuSung, it seemed like the walls around her heart were too thick.

‘It’s probably too much to expect anything to come from me asking her to join my party when we aren’t even that close to each other.’

Even Shin YuSung, who had been raised on Martial Spirits’ Mountain, was quick on the uptake for matters like that.

“Aren’t you cold?”

He instead asked her that in a worried tone. Kim EunAh glanced at her soaked uniform and clicked her tongue.



* * *

“...Uhg, I guess using the dark meteorite really was going too

overboard. Wait?!”

Kim EunAh found something odd with Shin YuSung’s appearance.

“What the hell?! Why aren’t you even a little bit wet right now?!”

Unlike Kim EunAh, who was completely drenched in rainwater, there was not a single drop of it on Shin YuSung’s hair or on his uniform.

“Oh, this?”

Shin YuSung pointed to the area above his head. Kim EunAh had to crane her neck up because of their differences in height. As she did so, she could see a barrier created by mana at the location he was pointing at.

“A-a barrier? You created a barrier to avoid the rain?”

Kim EunAh yelled, taken aback. Her eyes were wide open.

That was how out-of-the-ordinary Shin YuSung’s actions were, to create a mana barrier to merely avoid the rain. That was not something that anyone with a regular amount of concentration could even attempt.

‘What is he? Even maintaining a barrier for a short period of time is super difficult... ’

Shin YuSung was puzzled by her reaction.

“Doesn’t everyone do this?”

Shin YuSung’s master, the Fist King, had taught him the mana barrier skill.

[Hey, brat. Why are you hiding under a tree to avoid the rain? Hunters are supposed to avoid the rain using a barrier.]

He had learned how to do that trick when he was ten years old. To

Shin YuSung, creating a mana barrier was as easy as breathing.

“Hey, who the hell uses a barrier to avoid getting wet from the rain?! That’s something only you can do!”

While the two were bickering back and forth about the barrier, the armed city guards managed to arrive at the location.

“We’re Metro City’s guards! You can hand over the monsters to us.”

The man in his mid-twenties performed a 90-degree bow. Even if Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh were students, they were also hunters who were in charge of patrol for the entire city. Their positions were, thus, much higher than the city guards’, who were in charge of the safety for specific areas of said city.

“We’ve already received word from the top. You guys are the hunters sent by Gaon Academy for support...”

The head guard carefully began to speak up. Shin YuSung decided to respond in lieu of a disgruntled Kim EunAh.

“That’s us.”

“I’ve heard plenty of great things about Gaon, but you two really are amazing. To think you cleared a rank 4 gate...”

If the city guard had tried to take care of a rank 4 gate, there would have been a great list of casualties. A boss like the Silver Beak, especially, necessitated a skilled hunter to defeat.

The head guard couldn’t stop his compliments as he stared at the massive size of the boss monster.

“A Silver Beak this size is considered top-grade, even among others of its kind. Silver Beak material fetches a good price, so even after the cleanup crew takes their share, there will be quite a bit of money left.”

Shin YuSung was amazed at the man’s words at how the monster’s parts could be sold for money.

‘On the mountain, all I did was... roast the meat for food.’

That was great news for him.

Shin YuSung, whose dream was to be a hunter, was always low on money. The students who were rich had many more options on their hands, up to and including their pick of hunter gear, and their livelihoods at their dorms became much more lavish.

‘...So extracurriculars really are the best way to earn money.’

Shin YuSung felt rather good about that.

“So how much would these monsters fetch?” he asked.

Shin YuSung, who hailed from Martial Spirits’ Mountain, wasn’t even expecting all that large of a sum of money from the monster parts.

“Hm, if you combine the reward money for clearing the gate with the money earned from materials, each person should get at least 10,000,000 won**...”

But the amount that the head guard had told him was just too shocking.

That was around five times his current savings, 2,000,000 won. Considering that most first-year students’ requests paid around 300,000 to 1,000,000 won as a reward, it was around ten times that number.

“T-ten million...” he mumbled to himself, staring at the Silver Beak.

If Shin YuSung was an Association hunter and the government had placed a bounty on the boss, he could have gotten even more money out of it.

A new world that he had never even known about before. To the pure Shin YuSung, the taste of capitalism was sweet on his tongue.

“Just sign here, please. The government agency will take care of the rest.”

“Here you go!”

Unlike Shin YuSung, who had written his name with no further explanation needed, Kim EunAh’s reaction was unenthusiastic.

“Sign this...? That’s too much of another.”

“But we need you to do this so that we can distribute the reward money to you hunters...”

One of the important duties that the city guard was in charge of was the distribution of reward money. The head guard was adamant on the subject. Kim EunAh yawned, then nudged Shin YuSung with her elbow.

“Just write your name down for the trash mobs as well.”

One signature for ten million won. It was a deal that could be seen nowhere else. Shin YuSung, eyes wide, looked at Kim EunAh.

“B-but half of this money is yours, right?”

It was the rare sight of Shin YuSung fumbling over his words.

But Kim EunAh’s financial power was not something that could be grasped with a common person’s financial sense.

“Me? I’m good... It makes me look bad. I won’t sign off for chump change like this.”

To Kim EunAh, who had an entire theme park lent to her for a school test, 10 million won wasn’t even considered money to her.

“We can do that. Hunters have the right to give their share of the rewards to another hunter they worked with for the request.”

The city guard quickly thrust out the document towards Shin YuSung at the girl's words, in a hurry to get the procedure over and done with.

“...I understand.”

Eventually, Shin YuSung wrote down his name once more, the letters proper and rigid on the document. The city guard gave the two another ninety-degree bow.

“Then, I wish you luck until it's time to switch rotations!”

Shin YuSung had suddenly gained a hefty sum of 20 million won.

The sky had cleared up sometime during their interaction. The sun shined pleasant rays over the city.

“I can't believe a gate opened up in the city... that was so scary!”

“Look, it's the hunters!”

As the restriction on 155th Street opened, the citizens began to populate it once more, filling the atmosphere with a vibrant air that seemed like it had never gone away in the first place.

Among those citizens, the manager of the cafe that had been situated near the gate bowed to Shin YuSung and Kim EunAh.

“Oh, goodness, thank you so much! The cafe is safe and sound thanks to you!”

“We only did our jobs.”

The middle-aged manager shook their head vigorously at Shin YuSung's textbook reply.

“If it's alright with you... please! I wish to at least serve you a drink to express my thanks!”

Kim EunAh, who had been drying her clothes with mana, brightened as she heard that.

“Oho, a cafe?”

Kim EunAh had been badgering him to go to a cafe for a good while. Shin YuSung, who had obtained 10 million won from a single signature, eventually conceded, nodding his head after checking the time.

“Yeah. Let’s go in.”

“The best palate cleanser is~ definitely an americano.”

Kim EunAh skipped towards the cafe, humming to herself the entire way there. She looked to be in high spirits.

Shin YuSung pondered the situation as he watched her go.

‘How unexpected.’

She considered 10 million won a waste of her time but was that ecstatic over a cup of coffee. Kim EunAh fascinated him in more ways than one.

**The hanja for each syllable of 흑운석 (known more commonly as black meteorite, Tled here as ‘dark meteorite’ to not confuse people into wondering if it’s blue or black) can individually also mean 黑雲石, or literally Black Cloud Stone.*

***Around US\$10,000.*

Chapter 45

A cool, air-conditioned café...

EunAh sucked in a gulp of her iced americano as she enjoyed the pleasant breeze hitting her face.

“Ahh~ this is the stuff.”

EunAh’s expression was one of happiness as she drank her beverage. YuSung watched her in fascination.

“Really? It’s too bitter for me.”

“Hah, brat. If you become an adult like me, you’ll enjoy bitter flavors like this.”

EunAh kept sipping her americano triumphantly. On the other hand, YuSung was drinking a tooth-rotting caramel macchiato with whipped cream on top.

‘It’s so sweet.’

YuSung really enjoyed the drink that EunAh had ordered for him.

“I like this.”

EunAh snorted. She leaned her chin against her arm and then glanced towards the boy.

“By the way, how is this the first time you’ve ever been at a café at your age?”

“Hm, well, I had been living on Martial Spirits’ Mountain since I was five years old, after all.”

“F-five years old? You were living there until just recently?”

The straw fell out of EunAh’s mouth as it hung open from her shock. If he was seventeen currently, and he had been on the mountain since he was five, then he had spent 12 years of his life there. It was unfathomable to her.

“What... no way.”

Even if he was the Fist King’s disciple...

Surely he must have left the mountain every in a while, she thought. EunAh was taken quite off guard by his declaration.

“If you were on the mountain this entire time, then what about your family? Did you not see them at all?”

It was a question born from her skepticism. YuSung gave her a calm answer.

“I’ve never left Martial Spirits’ Mountain all that time. My only family is Master.”

A moment of silence.

That was the first time that EunAh had heard that YuSung was an orphan. Up to that point, she had only known that the Fist King had raised him.

“Oh? Th-that so, huh? Now that you mention it, the mountains aren’t too bad, really. For starters, um... the air is clean?”

EunAh tried to respond casually, but it was rather obvious that she was nervous.

Sipp.

The only sound was from EunAh’s straw as it sucked in nothing but air. An awkward atmosphere began to permeate the café.

"I'm fine," replied YuSung.

EunAh finally opened her lips at his nonchalant reply. She began to engage him carefully.

"...Hey, look."

Her fingers danced along the tabletop, betraying her nervous energy. EunAh looked outside the window and continued to talk in the most neutral tone she could muster.

"It's okay. You don't have to pretend it's all fine."

Kim JunHyuk had fallen into a coma two years ago.

Her voice lowered as she recalled the memory that had sprung up out of nowhere.

"That is to say... I'm sorry... For bringing the topic up in the first place."

EunAh timidly apologized to her extracurricular partner, fiddling with her hair. YuSung was the first person in the Academy who had ever gotten an apology from her that was so sincere.

'She's surprisingly delicate.'

YuSung found that new side of EunAh fascinating. Even so, he couldn't let her go and blame herself over it.

"No, it really is fine. Hm... they're still alive, for starters," he replied, laughing.

EunAh creased her forehead.

"Huh? You said you didn't have any earlier!"

YuSung slowly shook his head.

“They’re all perfectly fine. It’s just that we aren’t family anymore.”

“So you mean...”

It seemed like she had just realized what sort of situation YuSung was in.

“My household disowned me.”

EunAh didn’t say anything to his composed reply. He had told her that he had entered the Martial Spirits’ Mountain when he was five years old. The logistics were incomprehensible to her.

“That’s... really weird. Just what sort of crazy mistake did you make that would make them abandon a five-year old?”

At that moment, they were the only two customers in the café. EunAh’s questions were proposed to YuSung carefully, but it wasn’t necessary. He didn’t particularly feel a need to hide his past.

‘It’s probably better to talk about a lot of things with EunAh if I want to be friends with her.’

While the act of venting your innermost thoughts didn’t have any direct or physical benefits, it was meaningful in its own right.

“My household didn’t want a successor with an F-rank Trait.”

“...So they threw you away, huh.”

EunAh sighed, then looked directly into YuSung’s eyes. If a family wanted to be considered one of the top hunter families in a country like South Korea, which was known for being a hunter stronghold, the strength of its successor was key.

‘Even so... ’

The idea that they had abandoned a child for that reason left a bitter taste in her mouth.

“You said household, right? Does that mean... you’re from a famous clan?”

A famous clan of hunters that used the last name ‘Shin’. In Korea, there was only one household that came to mind for EunAh.

“No way... the Shin-Oh family?”

YuSung nodded his head. EunAh bit her straw and began to think.

‘I just threw that out there... to think he was actually from there.’

The Shin-Oh family was acknowledged by Kim JuHyuk, her grandfather and the president of the Shinsung group. If a large guild began a raid in the Tower or a dungeon, there was always a member of the Shin-Oh family in the mix.

‘The Fist King’s disciple and born from the Shin-Oh clan... that’s pretty sick, honestly.’

EunAh suddenly opened her mouth, remembering something.

“Hey, but the Shin-Oh family... there’s a second-year student from there!”

Shin HaYoon.

—First in the student rankings among the second years.

—Next term’s student council president.

And the sole student in Gaon who had hunted a rank 5 boss monster.

EunAh’s train of thought had reached Shin HaYoon—a person even she couldn’t ignore.

“Yep. It’s not like I remember her face all that much anymore, though.”

YuSung nodded once more as if it was no big deal. EunAh, on the other hand, looked furious.

“So they threw you away and raised Shin HaYoon instead, huh?... Because her Trait is S-rank?”

Crumple–

The paper cup crumpled up in her hands as she put force into her grip without thinking. EunAh leaned her chin lazily on her arm and stared at YuSung.

“You really are a saint. How did you just endure all of that? If it was me, I would’ve...”

“I’m fine. It was thanks to them that I could meet Master, after all.”

Those were his true feelings.

Compared to the Shin-Oh family, where meritocracy triumphed over all, his master, the Fist King, felt more like family to him than they ever had.

Sipp.

‘Time to go.’

YuSung placed his finished cup on the table to break the awkward atmosphere. EunAh called out to him.

“Hey.”

Shuffle.

A black credit card was lodged between her fingers. She extended her hand towards YuSung.

“I’m... going to buy another drink.”

Her expression seemed displeased, somehow.

“What’s the issue? You told me you’ve never been to a café before since you were stuck in the mountains.”

“But still...”

YuSung laughed shakily at her insistence. EunAh, embarrassed, kept waving the card in his direction with a pissed-off expression on her face.

“Come on! The café sells a bunch of things, like cake. Go ahead and order whatever you want.”

YuSung took the card at her continued pressuring.

‘...Is this how she shows she cares?’

The way EunAh showed her emotions seemed immature to him, but it wasn’t like he disliked that aspect of it. He smiled.

“Okay, sounds good.”

The sole granddaughter of a chaebol family, Kim EunAh, and an orphan, Shin YuSung. The relationship between the two people, with seemingly no overlap with each other, grew closer at that moment.

* * *

The seventh floor of Metro City Hospital...

It was closed off to regular people, a forbidden area to them. But the reality was different.

“Just what kind of villain is going to visit a hospital, anyways? We’ve been guarding this place for two years already...”

The city guard.

The man in his late twenties was an elite bodyguard who worked for the city guard. His job, however, was solely to be a part of the shift that guarded the hospital room on the 7th floor.

“Stop whining. The pay is good and there’s no danger. You think jobs like this fall out of trees?”

The guard next to him scolded him. The man who started the conversation in the first place let out a large sigh in response.

“Hah, to be honest, I do really like that the job isn’t dangerous at all. But... it’s really boring.”

“Fair...”

“And what sort of insane villain would target a large city like Metro City, anyways? Even this hospital is firmly guarded.”

The guard checked the time with his Pocket. Three hours were left of his shift. There was not another living creature in sight, not even an ant.

“Didn’t you see the faces of the nurses coming up here? They leave the 7th floor with all the energy drained out of their bodies.”

“Haha, I bet. The entrance process into the floor takes five minutes in and of itself, after all.”

While the two men were gossiping with each other, a helmet appeared from behind them and inserted itself between their heads.

“Ahahah~ right, right! It’s really awful here, like you said! All of my energy gets drained whenever I come here!”

An energetic voice, riddled with static, came from the helmet. The guards belatedly reached for their hips with their hands, but their weapons were missing.

“Shit, when did she take them!” they yelled, not intimidating in the slightest.

The villain wearing the helmet was, in fact, was showing off the items in both of her hands.

“Oh my, are you oppas looking for this, perhaps~? Ahaha!”

TL/N: Oppa is a title used by women to refer casually to men who are older than them. It's also the title used by women to refer to their older brothers. You also see women use oppa for their boyfriends a lot in Korean dramas.

The items in her hands were the security guards' guns.

“You little!”

Green emotes spawned on the villain's helmet as if to mock them.



“What, you’re gonna fight me without any weapons? You oppas are so brave~”

[^o^ LOL]

The villain laughed, one hand covering the area where her mouth was supposed to be, then she aimed the guns at the two guards.

“Ah, now that I think about it, I’m feeling a little hurt by this~. All I did was play a little prank, but you try and bring these scary weapons out in response? Isn’t that a bit much?”

The two stopped moving as she pointed their guns back at them. Even if they were members of the city guard, they weren’t hunters, only normal people. There was no way they could shrug off a bullet wound.

“How did you bypass the security system...”

The security guard in his twenties couldn’t believe what was happening. How did the villain in front of his eyes approach them without setting off any alarms?

The woman with the helmet laughed crookedly at the man’s question.

“Curious? Ugh~ the best way I could handle this is to just say my methods are a secret, then escape in a cool fashion or whatever... But that doesn’t really fit my style, hehe. I guess you could say that the jerk next to you was an informant.”

She began prattling on while typing something into a hologram screen that had appeared in the air.

“I know I don’t look like it, but I’m the smart type, so stuff like this is my specialty. Isn’t it fascinating?”

There was no exaggeration in her words. With a few quick movements of her hand, all of the security systems on the 7th floor were deactivated.

Vween! Click! Click! Click!

All of the doors that had been closed shut slid open, and the lights in the hallway shut off. Only then did the security guards figure out the

identity of the woman in the helmet.

“It-it’s Cheat...”

“No way... the Rebellion’s hacker!”

An infamous villain group known as the Rebellion.

Cheat was a hacker who had a bounty put on her by China for leaking confidential secrets.

“No way, am I that popular already? That’s a problem,ahaha! This is only the beginning of my exploits!”

“Get her!”

Cheat was laughing her ass off. One of the guards ran towards her, trying to throw his body on top of her.

Flash! Sss!

But her body turned into light, then disappeared. She reappeared next to the other guard, giggling all the while.

Flash!

“Aha. I’m here~”

‘Blink’.

It was a form of teleportation Skill. The guards took out weapons from their Pockets and began to wave them around, but it was already too late. By that point, Cheat’s body was completely flickering.

Flash!

“Slowww.”

Flash!

“Oh, that was a little dangerous.”

That situation wasn't a fight to her but a source of amusement. As the men approached her, she used Blink once again to attack them from behind.

Thwap!

“Keuk!”

“Argh!”

The guards fell down onto the ground without another peep from their mouths as she struck their neck from behind, hands formed into a blade shape. All that remained was the defenseless Kim JunHyun, who was laid down in the hospital room.

Step step.

The door was wide open. Cheat languidly stepped into the room. Even cutting-edge technology was child's play to her hacking skills. It would have probably been better off if the defense system consisted of nothing but a steel door—no electronics, no anything.

Cheat looked around the place and began to mumble to herself.

“Damn, the world really is unfair. Back when I was in Guangzhou~ oh wait, Claw, you're listening, right?”

She was just as chatty as she had been before, but her talking speed seemed to have gone down, perhaps due to her being lost in thought.

“No response, huh. You're listening in on me, right? I'm talking right now.”

She kept asking for the other person. Soon after, a voice rang out from the Pocket in her suit.

–Have you obtained the cycle stone yet?

Cheat looked down at Kim JunHyun and giggled in lieu of a reply.

“Later. Just listen to me for a sec.”

She reached out towards the machine next to the comatose man. A small jewel labeled as the cycle stone was embedded into the massive device.

“When I was little, I had to worry about where I would sleep, what I would eat that day, that sort of thing, you know? But I can use the money they spend for one night’s stay in this hospital room to eat dim sum at Tianhe for a whole year.”

Cheat took the cycle stone out of the machine and began to fiddle with it.

“It’s unfair, right? You think so too, don’t you?”

Just as she was gearing up to ramble on and on again, the man on the other side of the line shot her down.

–I’ll ask you again... Did you get the cycle stone?

Cheat grinned, though the action was hidden by her helmet. She squeezed the stone in her hand. Every villain who joined the Rebellion had their own motivations and goals.

Her own reason had never changed since she had first joined them.

–Again. Did you take...

“Aargh, stop nagging me! I got it!”

Cheat shook her head in frustration. She then walked up to Kim JunHyun until she was right next to him.

Bzzt.

[Sorry~♥]

[TT^TT LOL]

She flashed a series of messages towards him through her helmet, looking down at him all the while. It was her form of apology for what was about to happen.

Chapter 46



Five slices of cakes, demolished.

YuSung was recovering his lost energy with cakes and drinks. EunAh

tutted and shook her head at the sight.

“Don’t choke. Are those really that delicious?”

“Very.”

YuSung scooped up a piece of tiramisu and shoved it in his mouth. She watched him do so with a haughty expression on her face.

“Why do you like tiramisu if you hate coffee that much?”

It wasn’t a question that YuSung could answer, though. The taste was indescribable: Soft cream cheese, sweet cake drenched in syrup, bitter coffee powder that cut through the sugar.

“Can I order another one?”

YuSung was in bliss from having a cake put in front of him. Considering everything, it was a pretty obvious reaction from him. The boy had practically lived the life of an ascetic on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain—to him, the provocative delicacies of the outside world were assaults to his senses.

‘With 10 million won, I can buy...’

He thanked EunAh again for being able to taste those cakes. He had, at that moment, relearned the true value of that large sum of money.

“Yeah, go ahead~ Actually, why don’t you just buy this whole place?”

EunAh waved her black credit card around in a sarcastic manner. Her joke, however, didn’t seem much like one to YuSung.

‘...It really doesn’t feel like a joke when EunAh is the one saying it.’

He was getting used to the other girl’s quirks. That attitude was how she expressed her feelings of friendliness towards another person, even if she was being obtuse and clumsy about it.

As the sole daughter of a chaebol group, EunAh didn't even deign to hold a conversation with someone if they didn't interest her.

Her current display of kindness was proof that a measure of goodwill had been formed from her towards YuSung, past the initial intrigue.

EunAh looked outside the window and began to speak to YuSung.

"So you're going to go back as soon as the patrol is over?"

YuSung nodded his head in reply.

"That's what I'm planning to do. What about you, EunAh?"

"Me? I..."

She paused. Her next destination after the end of her shift was the hospital. She wanted to visit her brother before heading back to the school herself.

But EunAh didn't want YuSung to know about that. Rather, she didn't want to talk to anyone about her brother. She was sick of garnering people's sympathy.

"...Dunno, shopping, maybe?"

Unconsciously, she avoided the other's gaze as she gave her response. YuSung watched her as he stood up from his seat.

"We should go."

Right then...

Weeeewooo—!!

A speaker in the café began to blare loudly—it was the noise of the siren that was only used during emergencies.

"N-no way!"

EunAh checked her Pocket, but there was no warning message to be seen.

[This is a city-wide announcement for Metro City]

[A villain has been reported to have emerged from the Metro City Hospital. Civilians in the area, please evacuate the area as quickly as possible.]

After listening to the announcement, YuSung looked towards EunAh and began to talk to her calmly.

“We aren’t in charge of that area.”

The hospital wasn’t under YuSung and EunAh’s jurisdiction, even if it was in the same city. Despite that fact, EunAh’s face was oddly pale.

“...A villain at the hospital?”

Her comatose brother, Kim JunHyuk, was in Metro City Hospital. EunAh clenched her jaw.

‘They were definitely aiming for the 7th floor!’

‘What are you doing? A villain appeared! We need to go to the hospital, now!’ She frantically spoke to YuSung.

“EunAh, we need to protect our own area. That’s our mission.”

There were other hunters who were in charge of the hospital. It was important that one protected their own assigned area.

Even if the city was currently peaceful, something could happen at any moment. If they left their posts, another villain could use the lull in security to commit their own crimes. Alternatively, another gate like the one from before could appear.

EunAh clenched her teeth hard enough to strain her jaw. She gave YuSung an intense glare.

“...Then don’t stop me. I’ll go on my own.”

EunAh ran out of the cafe, ending their conversation. The owner looked at the entrance that she had just left through with a worried look on their face.

“I can’t believe the siren rang twice today. It usually only rings maybe once a month.”

At their words, YuSung recalled the conversation that he and EunAh had earlier.

[I’m... going to buy another drink.]

Should he stick to the mission and follow the rules? Or should he follow EunAh?

[What’s the issue? You told me you’ve never been to a café before since you were stuck in the mountains.]

YuSung wouldn’t normally think too hard about his decision—but something was different that time. He had initially approached EunAh to try and recruit her as an ally due to her skills. As they began talking to one another, however, his reasons to do so began to grow.

[Come on! The café sells a bunch of things, like cake. Go ahead and order whatever you want.]

YuSung narrowed his eyes.

Right when he was about to lean towards a decision, EunAh’s expression from earlier suddenly popped up in his head.

[...Dunno, shopping, maybe?]

There was something behind her eyes back then, a thought that had cast a shadow over her face. YuSung had a bad habit of not being able to ignore those he had a soft spot for.

“It can’t be helped.”

He made his decision. Right after, he made a call to someone.

* * *

The 5th floor of Metro City Hospital...

Booom!

A side of the hospital was blown to smithereens.

Woosh.

The dust formed by the debris of the demolished wall blew away into the air. Right after, a man emerged from the hole in the side of the building.

“Urgh! Keuuk...”

He let out a guttural cry from his throat while clenching his head between his hands. His eyes were bloodshot and unfocused, the picture of horror.

“Aaaargh!!” the man roared in pain.

The hunter that had been dispatched to the area was absolutely terrified.

“How can someone destroy a building like that with his bare hands... and without any special abilities...”

The Association’s rank 3 hunter, Yu AeRi.

Her first-ever emergency dispatch mission was driving her to tears.

“Senior, can’t you come up to the 5th floor? I can’t stop him on my own!”

–I already told you I can’t! And capture him no matter what it takes! You know who this berserker guy is, right? Don’t forget, if he dies, it’s over for the both of us!

AeRi’s senior colleague scolded her harshly.

“How am I supposed to capture him when I don’t even know if I can beat him...”

Her sentence trailed off as she teared up.

But it was too late for any regret.

The hunters who were stationed near the hospital were AeRi and her senior. Aside from them, there were some city guards who had been stationed at the hospital itself. That was it.

‘Th-the hospital is... completely destroyed now, of course.’

As she looked at the unconscious guards strewn around the man, the thought that came to her mind was:

‘It’s impossible for me to subdue him.’

The man suddenly looked over at AeRi and bared his teeth.

“Keuuuk!”

With a pained cry, he began to sprint towards her.

“Kaaaaaaa!”

Punch!

AeRi was thrown into the air by his blow and hit the opposing wall like a sack of potatoes.

“Keuuk!”]

She spat out blood—there seemed to be damage to her organs.

The man had done that in just one blow.

‘...I can’t block a strike like this.’

She slowly lost consciousness.

AeRi slumped over in the wall she was embedded in. As she fainted, the man grabbed his head again and began to scream.

“Aaaargh!”

The symptoms he was suffering were from one of the chronic illnesses that a hunter could suffer.

—It was called Mana Rage.

There were various reasons as to why someone could suffer from Mana Rage, but the majority of cases were determined to be caused by the overuse of supplements.

A reflux of mana would tear into every nook and cranny of the affected’s body and mind, eventually crippling them. A circulation stone could delay the overflow, but it was a treasure of which only a few existed in Korea. On top of that, it was only a temporary measure.

“Keuk...”

The man began to make his way towards the exit. He had completely lost his mind to the pain and was attacking everything in sight.

However, he only managed to take a few steps until a woman’s voice stopped him in his tracks.

“Hold it.”

The identity of the person with the adamant tone of voice was Kim EunAh.

“Aaargh!!”

The man glared at her murderously. In response, EunAh aimed her index finger at him, then shot a bullet made of electricity from it.

Flash!

“I warned you.”

“Keuk, kuhhh...”

He let out a cry of agony as the bullet hit him in the arm. EunAh’s face was contorted in pain.

“...Oppa.”

She looked at her brother, who had become a complete wreck. JunHyuk was making strange noises with his mouth, eyes unseeing.

“K, hhh, euk!”

That JunHyuk was not the gentle brother that EunAh once knew. It was her job to stop his rampage.

She wanted to turn her head away from the sight, but she didn’t. Instead, she stared straight ahead.

“It hurts, doesn’t it, oppa? Just... wait for a minute. The hunters will be here soon. Just wait until...”

“Khh, khhhrrr...”

JunHyuk slowly, very slowly, made his way towards his sister.

“Don’t move!” EunAh shouted.

She stretched out her hand towards her brother, but he did not stop.

Instead, he met her eyes and approached her.

There hadn't been a single day since Junhyuk had fallen into a coma when EunAh hadn't wished for him to open his eyes.

“Krrr...”

Of course, the JunHyuk who was awake in front of her eyes at that moment was a far cry from the man that she had known.

[Mother scolded you again, didn't she? I know it hurts, but... there's no need to cry. She did that because she loves you. Come on. I'll give you a piggyback.]

The JunHyuk she remembered was considerate.

[Whoa! You're the top scorer again? You're so cool, Oppa!]

He was her pride and joy.

[Haha, of course I have to do well. I need to repay people's expectations, don't I? Our parents', and yours, too.]

A brother who was kind to everyone he met.

“I...”

With a pained voice, EunAh drew out her electricity.

“Told you... to stop...”

Bzzt! Zap!

Her lightning was crackling all over the place, betraying her turbulent emotions.

“Aaaargh!”

JunHyuk ran towards EunAh.

No matter how dearly she wished to become a hunter, Kim EunAh was, at the end of the day, a seventeen-year-old girl. And no matter just how deep of a berserker state Kim JunHyuk was in, he was still the one and only support in her life.

Zzt!

The blue electricity faded.

The loss of her will to fight was reflected in her abilities.

“...Huh?”

Vwoom! Bam!

JunHyuk's fist flew right at EunAh. She crossed her arms to block the blow, but the monstrous strength behind it threw her and embedded her into the opposite wall.

“*Gasp!* Keuk...”

She was desperately trying to catch her breath.

EunAh was powerless without her electricity. She couldn't move her arms, and blood was flowing from her head.

“Oppa...”

EunAh called for JunHyuk in a trembling voice.

“I...”

She stared at her brother and thought, ‘so this is how he's changed’.

“...Actually knew why.”

EunAh had previously lied, had turned away from the truth. She knew why JunHuyk had relied on those supplements.

She braced herself against the wall that she had been smashed into and shakily stood up. Her body was screaming in pain from the shock it had just taken. She ignored it.

“That you’re...”

The days when JunHyuk would receive his grades from the academy.

Those were the only moments in his life when the parents who he barely saw more than once a month would praise him.

“...Super fucking weak.”

EunAh laughed bitterly.

It probably all began back then.

Being a hunter and showing off his skills and strength became the sole way JunHyuk could prove his worth. So when he hit a limit to his abilities as a hunter, he couldn’t just accept it.

The talent that Kim JunHyuk so craved had not been given to him but to Kim EunAh.

It was why Shin YuSung was so fascinating to her.

YuSung had been abandoned by his family.

He had an F-rank Trait.

But he had not given up and had continued to become stronger.

“Kr...”

JunHyuk bared his teeth and began to growl.

With one hand braced against the wall, EunAh stared at her brother and began to bluff with all of her might.

“...Come at me. I’ll wake you up.”

Chapter 47

A beautiful, straight arc of light.

EunAh charged towards JunHyuk, leaving a trail of blue light behind her.

Flash!

“Argh!”

She narrowly dodged a punch that her opponent threw in her direction; her hair was blown backwards by the wind pressure.

Bzz!

EunAh covered her fist in lightning and hit JunHyun square on his side.

Bam! Bzzt!

The amount of lightning used was enough to retire a regular person instantly. But Kim JunHyuk was himself a hunter who used mana, even if he was in a berserk state at the moment.

“Khhg!”

JunHyuk’s body trembled from the shock it received. He retaliated with a swing of his arm.

Vmm! Flash!

Before his attack could connect, however, EunAh had already dissipated into light—she was using lightning to stimulate her physical abilities to draw out the fullest extent of her capabilities.

‘...I strained myself too hard earlier.’

Her mana was decreasing by the moment. To a hunter, their mana was their life. She needed a decisive blow to end the fight.

Flash!

EunAh appeared behind JunHyuk and stretched out her arms towards him. Her hands met his heavily injured back.

‘...Oppa.’

She squeezed her eyes shut.

She wanted to avoid the reality of the situation: that she was attacking her own brother directly.

But...

—For her sake.

—For her brother’s sake.

—For the city’s sake.

There was no other option. Kim EunAh had to suppress Kim JunHyuk.

“Take a rest for a moment.”

With that short remark, Kim EunAh began to discharge lightning. Blue light surrounded the two siblings.

Flash! Zzzzt!!

JunHyuk swayed on his feet after being assaulted by the electricity, then began to collapse in a dead faint. EunAh supported her brother’s body and laid him down on the ground.

Once she was sure the situation had settled, she bit her lip.

There was no reason for JunHyuk to suddenly go berserk as long as the circulation stone continued to purify his mana. Therefore, his state had to have been caused by someone tampering with the stone in his hospital room.

“Who’s the bastard who did this...”

She gritted her teeth in anger. The stone’s astronomical costs made it a tempting target for many villains, but the fact that they decided to attack a member of the Shinsung group meant that they were no ordinary, run-of-the-mill criminals.

EunAh stood up from the ground and scanned her surroundings with a tired gaze. She could see the unconscious Yu AeRi in the distance.

And just when she was about to truly determine that things were over and that she could relax, a voice began to whisper from behind her.

“That’s me~”

—A voice crackling with static.

Eyes widening, EunAh tried to turn her neck to face the attacker. But by then, she was too late.

“Idiot~ react faster next time.”

Cheat planted a needle into EunAh’s pale neck. An odd feeling began to spread throughout her body.

“You, wh-what is th...”

EunAh managed to quickly create distance between her and Cheat but began to sway as she lost the strength in her legs.

“Ugh!”

Cheat began laughing uproariously as if the whole scene amused her.

“Kuhahaha! Man, am I lucky! Look at this, Claw! I told you someone would take the bait, didn’t I? You gotta be patient if you wanna land a big catch!”

The electronic display on her helmet began to openly mock EunAh.

[LMAO～♪]

Cheat had opted not to return to the hideout after retrieving the circulation stone. Instead, she had hidden her presence on the floor above and waited for EunAh to appear, then used Blink to ambush her.

Her luck was truly exceptional.

Cheat had already known that Kim EunAh was in Metro City, but to think that both the fake, comatose successor and the real successor of the Shinsung group would be at the hospital! She licked her lips while staring at the girl from afar.

“Kuku. Hey, little miss rich girl. Aren’t you tired? Unni will take you safely back to her hideout, so why don’t you take a small breather?”

TL/N: Unni is a title primarily used by women to refer to their older sisters. Otherwise, fairly similar connotation to noona (saved for those who are relatively close to each other, not used to refer to old women).

“Shut up...! What the hell are you planning to do?”

“Man, you look pretty glamorous on the outside, but your mouth is just as filthy as the kids who live in our ghetto.”

Cheat glanced over at EunAh languidly. The mission that the Rebellion had initially given her was espionage and enacting information warfare. She wasn’t strong enough in combat to fight someone like EunAh.

But the needle that EunAh had been pierced with was called the Mind Number. The drug slathered on it had the effect of lowering one's ability to concentrate on manipulating their mana.

“Keuk!”

EunAh wheezed while clutching her shoulder. She had pulled the needle out earlier, but the joint was still throbbing.

“Mhm?”

Intrigued, Cheat began to slowly approach her. EunAh aimed her hands towards the villain and began shouting in desperation.

“Don't come near me!”

Bzz! Flash!

The lightning scattered as her concentration broke.

“Give up, missy. If you keep resisting, I'll have to get a little rough here, too. For example, hm...”

Cheat gently placed one of her black walker boots on top of JunHyuk's head.

“If you piss me off too much, I can just... get rid of this piece of trash. How about that?”

“Shit, I'll kill you! Take your foot-*cough!* Keuk...”

EunAh began to scream, enraged, but Cheat wasn't even fazed.

“Aw, c'mon. Don't strain yourself like that—you'll collapse. Actually... if I pump enough mana into my foot, I think his head'll actually explode. Wanna bet on it?”

She instead doubled down on the taunts, lightly kicking JunHyuk's head in the meanwhile.

“And now that I think about it... I only really need one hostage, don’t I?”

The smile had vanished from Cheat’s face.

She spoke even faster now that the humor was gone from her tone.

“If I get rid of this guy, you’ll be the only successor left, right? It’s easier to threaten someone who’s perfectly fine like you instead of an unconscious, bedridden guy like him, too. Right, I should just kill him. It’s too much of a pain trying to deal with two of them.”

—Madness.

From her casual tone of voice, EunAh could practically see the expressionless face of the villain on the other side of the helmet. Cheat had infiltrated Metro City to steal the circulation stone. She could tell that the woman’s words were no bluff.

Thump.

EunAh gently bit her lip, then lowered herself onto her knees.

“...Keuk.”

Normally, it was something she would never do against a villain. But to EunAh, JunHyuk was her sole, precious brother.

“...I got it, so let my brother go. You only need me to be a hostage, right?”

Pride wasn’t important to EunAh as long as she could save her brother.

Seeing her surrender, Cheat finally took her foot off of the man’s head.

“...Fufu, you’re actually pretty agreeable, aren’t you? Don’t worry, I’m not that bad of a person, either.”

Stomp stomp.

Cheat began to strut towards EunAh like a model on a runway.

‘Oppa... ’

EunAh fell into her thoughts as she gazed at her fallen brother. Would things have turned out differently if she had listened to SHin YuSung and had stayed in her patrol area? The villains weren’t even aiming for JunHyuk. Her own decisions had exacerbated the situation.

‘...I ruined everything.’

EunAh was completely spent on mana and had been struck by the Mind Number needle. If she became a hostage of the Rebellion, there was no way to know when she would be free from their clutches. There was no question that the Shinsung group would be threatened endlessly with the life of its successor.

‘I ruined... ’

EunAh closed her eyes.

Thinking about it rationally, there was no hope she could cling to for rescue from that situation. Yu AeRi, who had been dispatched there, was unconscious. By the time other hunters arrived in the area, everything would already be over.

* * *

“See, you should’ve been cooperative from the beginning. All you did was waste my precious time.”

In contrast to her chilling words, Cheat let out an exuberant laugh. She took out some rope from her Pocket and began to tie EunAh’s hands together.

“Keep your promise... don’t touch my brother,” said EunAh, a pained expression on her face.

Cheat found that incredibly funny. She let out a large guffaw, unable to hold it in, and kept laughing for a good while before finally beginning to speak.

“What, you mean what I said earlier? Ha, hahahaha! Are you seeing this shit, Claw? She’s bringing up the promise I made!”

Claw did not reply; it was obvious that they had cut off the transmission on their end. Cheat continued to blabber on, undaunted.

“You crack me up. Really! I think there are tears in my eyes right now. Wait, I can’t even wipe them away because this helmet’s in the way.”

Cheat roughly grabbed EunAh’s chin with her fingers.

“Oh, boy... so innocent. Maybe it’s because you’re a student? You actually believed me? Well, I guess I’m kind of envious of you in that way. Pfft!”

EunAh turned pale at the villain’s words. Cheat stood up and looked down at her.

“Hey, little miss rich girl. The funny thing about an item is: the rarer it is, the better the price you can get for it.”

“Wh-what’s that supposed to mean?!”

EunAh belatedly began to struggle, but it was useless. With her hands tied together, she eventually lost her balance and fell to her side.

It was a humiliation that she had never experienced up until that point in time.

On the ground, she couldn’t even keep her body steady, but EunAh continued to desperately ramble on.

“Why? What’s your goal? You promised! You promised you’d let my brother live...”

Cheat lifted an index finger to her helmet and made a shushing motion.

“No, no. It’s different now that you’re the one who’s being captured~ Didn’t you hear what I just said? That the rarer the item, the better price you can get for it? It’s the same with a hostage.”

Saying so, she began to approach Kim JunHyuk.

“If I can’t take both of you, well. That means it’s definitely better for there to only be one of you instead of two.”

Cheat’s intent was clear. She would kill Kim JunHyuk so that there would only be one successor to the Shinsung group left alive. There was not an ounce of guilt in her, despite the fact that she was about to end a person’s life solely for her own gain.

“This’ll be a little violent for the students in the audience. Wouldn’t it be better for you if you closed your eyes?” she said, showing her own form of consideration.

She lifted her mana-imbued foot high into the air. If that foot struck down on JunHyuk’s head, it was all over.

“S-stop! I’ll give you as much money as you want! I won’t struggle! So please...”

EunAh begged. Her breath came out in short gasps, and her pleading voice was no louder than a whisper.

“...Please. Don’t do it.”

But Cheat merely enjoyed the show that the girl was putting on for her.

“Sorry, I don’t negotiate with hostages. They call me a villain for a reason, you know~”

Her black walker boot flew down. At the moment when she was about to stomp JunHyuk’s skull into smithereens, EunAh finally looked

away, eyes closed.

‘Please, someone, anyone.’

Bam! Boom!

The dull sound of a foot colliding with something echoed throughout the area.

A cool breeze tickled EunAh’s side as if a rush of wind had passed her by. Only then did EunAh harshly let out the breath she was holding and open her eyes.

“Haak! S... sob! Waah...”

But what was in front of her eyes was so much different than what she had expected. JunHyuk was perfectly fine, and Cheat had been thrown into a wall.

“Keuk, cough! Has the backup already arrived? There’s... no way. M-my data showed me...”

Her carefree expression had been completely wiped from her face. She was propping herself up on the ground.

Kim EunAh turned her head to look at the person who had created the scene.

—To Shin yuSung.

“...YuSung-ah.”

EunAh had ignored YuSung’s advice and had left her designated area. On top of that, she had worsened the situation and had become the villain’s hostage. Even to her, the one that had created the entire mess was her own self.

But despite all of that, YuSung had come to save her. EunAh looked at the boy with her tear-ridden face.

Her hair was a mess.

Tears were dripping down her face.

Pride left to the wayside, EunAh began to beg to YuSung fervently. It was an expression that one would usually never see on her.

“I’m begging you... please... save my brother...”

Instead of a reply, YuSung looked down at EunAh.

‘...So the reason why she rushed to the hospital was for the sake of her family.’



EunAh had called the unconscious man her brother. The gown he was wearing made it clear that he was a patient at the hospital.

The reason as to why she didn't want to talk about it earlier was clear. YuSung nodded in lieu of a reply to EunAh's downtrodden figure.

To him, the mentality of a villain—who used a hunter's power to commit crimes—was completely different from his own.

YuSung glared at Cheat with cold eyes, as-then unseen from him before that point in time.

'I'll finish this in an instant.'

His emotions were raging on the inside, but his mind was more calm and serene than it had ever been before. YuSung knew very well through his strenuous training that excessive emotions could lead to him making wrong decisions.

Of course, his anger did not exist solely due to EunAh's heartfelt request.

'...I don't need any reason other than the fact that I need to capture a villain.'

The boy took his stance. At once, blue-tinged mana began to erupt beautifully from his form.

Tup!

YuSung rushed towards the fallen Cheat at an incredible speed, but the villain's Skill was Blink. Even if Cheat wasn't well suited for combat, she was confident in her ability to run away.

"And just who are you trying to catch?"

Right when she was about to turn into light and disappear—

YuSung heightened his concentration to his utmost capabilities.

'A teleportation user?'

His perception of time slowed down to a near stop. Even if Cheat herself had disappeared into pixels, traces of her mana still lingered.

‘...Right in front of the exit.’

There was a limit to teleportation abilities. He only had one chance to capitalize on it. That chance was the moment when Cheat let down her guard after using her Skill.

Tup!

YuSung began to run towards the exit before he even turned his head in that direction. Even to a hunter, it was near impossible for one to find the location where Blink would drop off its user. But Shin YuSung’s concentration surpassed human limits.

“Over here!”

Battle God Style Third Form – Heaven Shattering Fist Strike

After determining the location, YuSung aimed his fist towards the exit of the building. As a result, Cheat was hit square in the helmet by his punch as soon as she had finished teleporting.

Boom!

The helmet shattered into pieces from the shock, and Cheat slumped down on the spot—a rather anticlimactic end for a villain who was part of the Rebellion.

“Y-you did it!”

EunAh yelled, staring at Cheat, face ruined with tears. It was a natural reaction, considering the fact that a student had managed to defeat and capture a villain who had created such a huge buzz around the world. On the other hand, YuSung was looking down at Cheat’s prone form with a puzzled, suspicious expression on his face.

‘...She’s so weak.’

To YuSung, who had been molded into a weapon for combat by the Fist King, a spy like Cheat was much too weak.

Chapter 48

Cheat had been taken down in one hit.

Kim JunHyuk had been taken down by electricity.

The actual hunter sent out to deal with the berserk patient, Yu AeRi, was knocked out cold, but YuSung and EunAh had managed to perfectly resolve the situation.

‘Even so, I shouldn’t let my guard down.’

YuSung placed handcuffs on the unconscious villain. The cuffs were hunter gear that Yu AeRi had put in his Pocket before the start of his shift.

‘I didn’t think I would actually use these.’

After finishing everything up, YuSung turned back to look at EunAh. He had already gotten rid of her restraints beforehand, so the girl was trying to stand up, leaning against a pillar to do so.

“...Oppa.”

EunAh looked at JunHyuk and grimaced. Emotionally, she wanted nothing more than to run up to her brother, but handling a coma patient improperly could have negative consequences. She had to wait for the rescue team to arrive first.

Stomp, stomp, stomp!

The sound of footsteps drew nearer.

A group of people belatedly arrived at the scene of the crime—members of the city guard, paramedics, and three hunters.

“Th-this is...”

But their hurried steps came to an abrupt stop at the sight laid before them—Cheat and AeRi, collapsed at the scene. The hunter in charge, Ju SangHyuk, kept switching between looking at YuSung and EunAh.

“...So you two defeated Ch-Cheat?”

Two students had defeated a member of the villain organization, Rebellion. He couldn’t help the bemused expression that came on his face.

But EunAh shook her head, then glanced towards YuSung.

Ju SangHyuk gulped.

“...No way, by himself?”

EunAh nodded. The one who had defeated Cheat was Shin YuSung. She didn’t want to take any of the credit for the boy’s exploits.

“In any case, this is incredible. I can’t believe some students defeated a villain on their own. Though, I suppose if you look at it one way, you could say it was reckless, but...”

SangHyuk trailed off as if remembering something. He looked back at YuSung.

“Ah, right!” he shouted, “You, you’re the one that was assigned for patrol!”

—The oft-rumored disciple of the Fist King.

Everything suddenly made sense to Ju SangHyuk. Even a villain working for the Rebellion would lose against the disciple of the Fist King—nothing was wrong with that.

“...If you’re the disciple of *that* Fist King, I suppose this isn’t reckless at all. Very well, then. I’ll report every bit of both of your exploits to

the higher-ups, so leave the rest to us.”

With that, he ended the conversation and began to direct the paramedics and the other hunters. EuhAh looked at her brother being placed on the stretcher and turned her head away from the sight in anguish.

—A long silence.

EunAh looked up at YuSung.

Her face betrayed her complicated emotions. She opened her mouth to say something, then shut it closed again. Then, she sighed and made a move to speak again.

“That... Sorry for...”

EunAh’s shoulders were slumped like a man who was awaiting his guilty sentence in court. It looked like all of the energy had left her body. YuSung had never seen her like that before. He tried to reassure her calmly.

“It’s fine. You did it for your family, right?”

He could tell just how much she cared for her brother through her actions. He could also understand why she would abandon her position if her brother was in danger.

“And everything ended up well, right?”

EunAh’s expression was still bitter, but she did respond to his efforts.

“...Thank you.”

Then she looked into YuSung’s eyes with a sincere gaze.

“I’ll repay you for this no matter what it takes. I... never forget a debt.”

Bold declaration behind her, EunAh made her way to the exit. However, on the way out, she was struck by a bout of dizziness—her body wobbled.

Sway!

“...Urgh!”

YuSung caught EunAh before she could lose her balance. She placed her hands on her head to stave off the headache, forehead creased in effort.

“Don’t worry, I’m fine. It’s just a mild...”

EunAh had insisted she was okay, but YuSung still did not let go of her arm.

“...You’ve depleted most of the mana in your body. You need medical attention. EunAh, you already know this, don’t you?”

She lowered her head in lieu of a response.

YuSung had a vague idea of why she was acting that way. He sighed.

“It’s because of your brother, isn’t it?”

EunAh nodded and began to mutter her reply.

“...I’ll get treated after I check on Oppa. Really. I promise. I don’t know when I’ll get to see him again after we part ways here...”

EunAh’s love for her brother was the real deal. YuSung quite liked that aspect of her.

Her deep affection for her brother was a reflection of his own desires for a family.

“...Get on my back. I’ll take you to him.”

YuSung lowered his posture and offered his back to EunAh.

“No, really, I can walk...! Haah.”

She waved her arms in panicked denial before abruptly stopping what she was going to say next. In her current condition, she could collapse at any moment.

Despite that, YuSung understood her desire to see her brother and made the decision to respect it. EunAh thought she should acknowledge his considerations and, in turn, stop putting airs on around him.

“Alright. Then... excuse me.”

Left with no choice, EunAh let herself be carried on YuSung’s back.

“Hang on tight.”

YuSung stood up. EunAh wrapped her arms around the boy’s neck to secure herself in place.

‘Hey, this is... ’

Just seconds after getting lifted up, EunAh encountered a problem that had never crossed her mind until right at that moment.

‘H-he’s too close... ’

Their bodies were touching. She could feel the heat radiating off his back. Her pride wouldn’t let her express any discomfort outright, so her only reaction was to have her face become redder and redder.

“Hey, a-aren’t I... aren’t I heavy?”

“Not really. More importantly, are you sure you’re alright? Your body feels really hot.”

“I-I’m fine!” she replied hurriedly. Getting a piggyback ride at her age

was much more embarrassing than she thought it would be. Even so, she felt a sort of comfort from the action.

It was due to the fact that she had remembered a similar thing happening way back in the past.

[Oh, boy. How do you even get into fights all the time like this?]

[They make fun of me! What am I supposed to do?]

She had probably been seven years old.

Her brother had carried her on his back just like YuSung was carrying her.

Of course, YuSung was the one giving her a ride at that moment, not JunHyuk. Even so, she felt the same comfort back then as she did from YuSung.



* * *

EunAh began speaking to the other boy once more, expression stiff.

“Hey, YuSung-ah...”

“Yeah?”

Tup tup.

YuSung walked slowly to their destination. EunAh continued to talk with a sincere tone of voice.

“Why aren’t you asking me anything?”

The fact that he hadn’t fascinated her. YuSung had not posed a single question that EunAh was reluctant to answer.

—Why her brother had been in that state.

—How long her brother had been in a coma. How she felt about it all.

Not only did he refrain from broaching those topics, but he also didn’t offer any cheap platitudes.

“...To be honest, I know for a fact that you must have a lot of questions regarding what happened today, so I was waiting for you to ask them.”

She finished off her question with a timid mutter. To that, YuSung gave her a serene response.

“Because you didn’t say anything.”

EunAh snorted. It was true, she had never talked to anyone about her brother before. But YuSung was different. Someone who saved her and her brother’s life was, at the very least, qualified to know more about the situation.

“The reason why Oppa... that is, why he went berserk is because... He took supplements.”

Once ingested, those supplements boosted the strength of one’s Trait

for a temporary period of time. However, it was forbidden to take them excessively.

With one pill, one could easily display strength exceeding their limits. Of course, an item that convenient had its own vicious drawbacks.

“He was... super fucking weak...”

The words expressing EunAh’s disappointment spilled out of her mouth miserably. The only way her tenacious brother could prove himself was through his strength as a hunter.

“He’s weak... and an idiot.”

Her disappointment was immeasurable.

Even if he never took those pills and became a powerful hunter, to EunAh, her kind older brother was a source of pride for her.

The events that had passed forced her to confront the thoughts that she had been avoiding up to that moment.

“I wish... that my talent had gone to him instead. Then things would have turned out...”

EunAh slammed her mouth shut after saying that. Only then did YuSung, who had been quietly listening to her the entire time, speak up.

“...Even so. None of this is your fault.”

She could be right. EunAh had the talent to become a hunter that JunHyuk had so desperately wanted—if he was the one with her talent, maybe he would have never used supplements in the first place, but that was where the talk about what-ifs ended.

It was not EunAh’s fault that JunHyuk had fallen into a coma.

But EunAh began to sob. Suddenly, she buried her face into YuSung’s

back. She grew silent, with shivers occasionally wracking her body.

YuSung smiled.

“Don’t cry, EunAh.”

EunAh’s eyes were red and welling up with tears. She decided to get angry for no reason.

“Shit... *sniff*. Who’s... who’s crying? I’m not!”

“Is that so? My back is already wet, though.”

Even though she was yelling at the other boy, EunAh didn’t look to be in a bad mood. YuSung simply smiled as he always did.

—A warmth that touched all the way down to one’s soul.

EunAh was once again feeling a comfort that she had only felt all those years ago. As if to reflect it, the words that came out of her mouth next seemed to be softer than her usual tone.

“Oh, YuSung-ah. Come to think of it... is anyone watching over our patrol area right now?”

She wasn’t putting him on the spot—she was merely curious. Considering YuSung’s personality, there was no way he would abandon his post so irresponsibly.

“Don’t worry. That area is safe.”

As expected, YuSung answered her question confidently.

* * *

Downtown in Metro City...

People were flocking in droves to see a rather peculiar sight.

“It’s the Fist King!”

“The Fist King is on patrol!”

“My god...”

Their gazes were fastened on the Fist King, Yu WonHak. More importantly, the man was doing a round of patrols with a city guard badge on his chest.

To think that the legendary figure, the symbol of Korea, would do a job usually reserved for third-rate hunters and students.

The citizens took out their cellphones and promptly began to document every action he was performing.

“What’s going on?”

“Yeah, I heard something was going on at the hospital. I thought he was heading that way.”

“Is he filming for something?”

“In what world would Fist King-nim be filming for anything?”

“And you think him on patrol duty is *less* weird?”

Yu WonHak cleared his throat loudly at the sight of all the people gossiping over a celebrity visiting their city.

“Brat... just what does he take his precious master for!”

Yu WonHak had been genuinely happy when YuSung had contacted him. It was a rare occasion in and of itself.

[Master, I have a request.]

—His dear, precious disciple’s request.

The Fist King had heartily agreed to it. Of course, he would never have guessed that the boy's request would be something as trivial as him patrolling the city. Not in a million years.

But even his complaints only lasted a moment.

Even the Fist King, Yu WonHak, was a sucker for his disciple, Shin YuSung, with whom he had spent twelve years of his life with.

‘Nothing I can do... it's the request of my disciple, after all.’

155th Road in Metro City was safer than it had ever been before on that day. There did not exist a villain who had the guts to commit a crime in a city that the Fist King was protecting.

Chapter 49

—Tangled, long hair.

—Eyes rimmed with dark circles.

—Sharp teeth bared in a grin.

Cheat was taking her mugshot wearing prison garb with her helmet off of her head, and restraints were on both of her arms. Of course, the mugshot was spread throughout the entire world.



[Rebellion member imprisoned!]

[Gaon's student captures villain!]

[Cheat's identity is a hacker from China?]

[Yu HanNah's exclusive scoop! First interview with Rebellion member!]

[Refuses to comply with investigation. Kept her mouth shut until the end...]

Jin ByungCheol was grinning ear to ear as he read an article detailing Shin YuSung's exploits.

“Kuhaha! Instructor Lin Xiao, have a look at this! People are getting really excited about how incredible our YuSung is, aren't they? Praise for Gaon is pouring in...”

That was to be expected. The Rebellion was one of the few villain syndicates that even Association hunters feared. Somehow, a first-year student from Gaon Academy had captured one of their members. It truly was something that had never happened before.

“I'm worried, though. The villains might hold resentment towards him, for example... hmm.”

“Haha! Well, that's true for all hunters, no? Besides, how will a hunter ever become famous and more powerful if they don't face any danger?”

“True enough.”

Lin Xiao nodded his head. He then pointed to an article about Adela.

“Adela conquered a dungeon for her extracurricular activity. Even so, her prowess is being buried under YuSung's own, it looks like.”

“That's good news to me. It's a little embarrassing to say this, but I'm telling you this because it's you...”

The headmaster looked back and forth between the pictures of Adela and Shin YuSung on the paper that detailed the entrants for the National Representative Selection.

“Be honest. Don’t you think it would be better if YuSung was the one chosen instead of Adela? I’m just saying... a student who’s from Korea would be a better representative than an exchange student from Italy.”

Even if Adela was chosen to represent Korea, there were many cases where a country would insist on having their representative be someone of the same nationality as the country itself.

“Because the Association is fairly conservative in that aspect.”

Lin Xiao could do nothing but nod his head at the other man’s words. The headmaster, satisfied, turned his gaze towards the outside of his window.

“Right. That is so.”

—Beautiful scenery. Large grounds.

Jin ByungCheol, as the headmaster, always put forth a strength-based meritocracy in his school. As a result, Gaon was always Korea’s top school.

He fiddled with his beard before beginning to speak once more.

“I was wondering, what’s your opinion? YuSung and Adela. Who do you think would win?”

Lin Xiao thought hard about the answer. Shin YuSung was strong, for sure. Even he, as an instructor, couldn’t properly gauge the boy’s full strength.

But Adela’s strength was something completely outside the realm of possibility among the first years. He had never seen a Trait quite as incredible as hers in all of Korea, which was known as the capital nation of hunters. The same could be said, of course, of China.

‘I suppose the one who was closest to her power would be Liú Jùn, the disciple of the Sword God... ’

Back when YuSung had just arrived at the academy, Jin ByungCheol

had posed a similar question, which was: ‘Between Liú Jùn and Shin YuSung, who’s stronger?’

‘Back then... I replied with Liú Jùn without an ounce of hesitation.’

Lin Xiao’s eyes flew wide open.

Adela or Shin YuSung. His opinion had changed from before.

“I think...”

After pondering it over, Lin Xiao gave his answer.

* * *

The pride and joy of China, Skyscraper Academy...

Liú Jùn was at the top of the gigantic, 100-floor building. He stared at his Pocket, then creased his forehead for just a moment.

[Rebellion member! Caught by a student!]

It was hard to believe.

Even among the extremist villain groups, the Rebellion was one whose name was becoming widely known at an incredibly fast rate.

‘And he defeated that Rebellion... by himself?’

Cheat, especially, was a famous villain with a bounty on her head for hacking into various security systems in China and taking information from them. Liú Jùn slowly lowered his gaze to check the name of the student who had managed such a feat.

“...Shin YuSung.”

A familiar cadence.

He remembered his strong initial impression of the young man. This time, he made sure to etch the name Shin YuSung into his mind.

Liú Jùn did not underestimate the boy for a second just because he had an F-rank Trait.

Shin YuSung's master was the Fist King.

One of the few in existence that Liú Jùn's master, the Sword God, considered a rival.

'If he's skilled enough for the Fist king to take him in as a disciple... '

He determined that YuSung had talent in some other area that had drawn the Fist King's attention, even if his Trait was F-rank. Proof of that could be seen in how he had dominated every activity he had participated in so far, and he showed no signs of stopping.

'There is definitely something to him.'

Liú Jùn closed his eyes.

Owing to the height of the building, a strong wind blew past him—its strength made him feel like he was floating in the air.

Liú Jùn had sacrificed everything to garner the favor of the Chinese branch of the Hunter Association, and China's name was elevated on the global stage through his skills. In return, the country provided him with something that he needed.

—Circulation stones.

The price of one stone could buy several buildings—that was how expensive it was. Liú Míng, his little sister, needed them for the treatment of her terminal illness.

On top of that, one circulation stone only lasted for a year.

If not for the support from China, it would be next to impossible for a

student like Liú Jùn to afford Liú Míng's treatment expenses.

As Liú Jùn experienced the sensation of his body floating in the air, his sister's face came up in his mind.

Liú Míng, who always grinned widely for him, had said this to him one day:

[After my illness is cured, I'm going to go and make friends. And... a lot of them!]

A bitter expression crept onto Liú Jùn's typically emotionless visage.

'She must be so lonely.'

It was no surprise that she was. There was not a single person within the hospital's grey walls that was Liú Míng's age.

The emotions that Liú Jùn felt during that time were indescribable. Even so, he gave his sister an obliging smile, then petted her head.

[...Right. I'm sure you will,] he had replied.

Liú Jùn wanted to fulfill Liú Míng's modest dream no matter what it took.

It was a given.

Even since they were little...

Liú Míng's wishes...

Had been his own wishes.

—That was how it had always been.

Whoosh!

Liú Jùn opened his eyes as the gale swept up around him, and his hair was being tossed around by the wind.

As the hologram fragments disappeared into the air, they left behind a silver blade in Liú Jùn's hand.

Slice!

Liú Jùn stepped forward and swung his blade without an ounce of hesitation.

Even the strong winds were stopped in their tracks in the silent world that he had created.

The clouds were split in half along the trajectory of the sword strike—it was the strength of Skyscraper Academy's number one. Liú Jùn sheathed his sword, grimacing.

‘...A dull strike.’

Even that incredible display of skill was not enough for him. In order to defeat every representative from every country, including Korea, he had to redouble his training—that was Liú Jùn's way.

* * *

The luxurious Sevens dorms...

YuSung was staring blankly at the amount of money written on his Pocket from the comfort of a sofa.

[Amount deposited: 20,000,000]

[Total deposit: 23,673,000]

20 million won from taking care of the gate.

It was quite a huge sum, even for hunters who worked for the Association. To YuSung, a student, the amount was even more

overwhelming.

‘If one banana-flavored milk costs 1200 won... I can buy sixteen thousand milks and still have money left over.’

Of course, he wasn’t actually going to buy that much banana-flavored milk, but to someone like him, who had never properly spent his money before, he liked to compare the value of money to food.

Now that the money was in his hands, it seemed even bigger than it had back then.

Again, YuSung was impressed by EunAh’s frivolous attitude.

‘Calling this amount... chump change, huh.’

YuSung didn’t need this much money right this moment, but he did have a plan in place as to how he was going to spend it.

‘I’ll have to constantly gather money from now on so that I can afford proper equipment for my party.’

YuSung did not want to join another group or person’s party—all he wanted was his own party, and also a room for the team.

But it was near impossible for a first-year student to acquire a room.

3000 SP was needed to obtain the rights to a room, which was way too much for a first-year student to afford.

Normally, one would gather the team or party members together, pool their SP, then buy the room—dividing up the rights to the space in that manner. But YuSung had no intention of doing that.

He needed to pay all 3000 points to be the party leader and enforce his plan on the other members.

While it was impossible for a regular first year, YuSung was different.

He had already collected half of the SP needed.

Part of it was due to his own work, but part of it was also due to the favoritism of the headmaster, Jin ByungCheol. Not knowing that fact, YuSung grinned.

‘Collecting SP is much easier than I thought it would be—I’m almost halfway there.’

The same was true of collecting money. Even if he collected the SP to buy the room, it would be a waste if he left it completely barren.

One needed quite a bit of cash to buy equipment and appliances used in academy-related activities.

‘A club would have some sort of budget given to them by the school, but... a party needs its members to earn money through extracurriculars.’

Gaon placed skill above all else. Only those with the abilities could climb to the top. However, that sort of attitude was nothing new to YuSung. He had lived on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain for twelve years; if there was one thing he was used to doing, it was proving his worth.

‘Even so, I should take a break tomorrow.’

It was finally the weekend.

YuSung had worked harder and done more than anyone else the past few days; he deserved the rest. Letting out a huge yawn, he made his way to his bed and lay on it. As he did so, the Pocket that he had placed by his bedside began to vibrate.

Vmm!

[Amy♥: Party Leader-nim, my filming is all done! No way!? Could it be? Tomorrow’s the weekend!!! ∖(◡ | ▽ | ◡) /]

It was a message from Amy.

YuSung could clearly see the girl's playful expression in his head as he read the contents.

Vmm!

Right when he was about to reply, she sent another message.

[Amy♥: We should celebrate your huge break, capturing the villain and all! Why don't we go on a picnic together?!(๓>◡|)ノ♡]

YuSung thought about it for a moment, then smiled. He had already decided on the answer.

[Shin YuSung: Sure.]

It was a given that one would enjoy their break more if they spent that time with others.

Chapter 50

The greatest chaebol in South Korea. The Shinsung group.

EunAh was the sole, beloved granddaughter of the Shinsung group's president.

The elegant marble floor and exquisite view in her living room were only a portion of the enormous wealth she enjoyed. Such was nothing more to the official heir to the chaebol than daily life.

Sip.

EunAh wet her lips with a cup of black tea that was worth more than its weight in gold; its overwhelmingly aromatic, mellow scent did nothing to affect her, however.

At that moment, the scent and flavor of the tea were of no importance to her.

‘...Why.’

EunAh impatiently checked her Pocket's message inbox to see if YuSung had contacted her, but he had not.

‘Why hasn't he contacted me...?’

She bit her lip in trepidation, her face showing her displeasure. A woman in formal attire, who had been watching her the entire time, finally made her move to speak up.

“Miss... Did something happen?”

Lee SuHyun.

An elite among elites hired to be the secretary of a guild leader at age 26, but EunAh gave her a distrustful look as she responded to her.

“Nothing. Nothing happened. That’s the problem.”

SuHyun gave the girl a pleasant smile in response to her coarse tone. Of course, her inner thoughts were quite different than what she was showing on the outside.

‘I must be out of my mind. Stooping down to the standards of a little kid like this? Screw the high pay. I shouldn’t have taken this job!’

Right when SuHyun was regretting her decision to be EunAh’s aide, the girl in question began to speak up in a faint voice.

“...That, uh, normally, if something big happens, shouldn’t the other person text you?”

SuHyun’s interest was piqued as she saw EunAh wear a timid countenance for the first time since she had taken the job.

“Are you waiting for someone to contact you, Miss?”

“No, it’s not like... I’m waiting for him, or anything...”

She avoided the older woman’s gaze and began to make up excuses for her attitude.

“I owe him a favor, stuff like that!”

SuHyun immediately deduced who the person in question was from EunAh’s words.

‘...Is she talking about that hunter who solved the hospital incident?’

His name was Shin YuSung or something.

He was EunAh’s fellow Gaon Academy student who had captured the Rebellion member and had saved both Kim EunAh and Kim JunHyuk.

All the pieces were falling together; SuHyun was having a hard time holding in her laughter.

‘...Well, well, well. Look at this! A headstrong girl like her is being all anxious. She has a cute side to her, after all.’

EunAh’s face scrunched up as SuHyun looked at her with a strange expression on her face.

“Why are you grinning at me like that?” she asked, voice cold.

“Oh! I apologize. It’s nothing, just that. If he doesn’t contact you first, then you could do so instead, Miss...”

EunAh placed her index finger to her lips and sincerely considered the woman’s advice.

“Me, contact him first...”

In all of her life up to that point, EunAh had never once contacted someone else first—as someone who always had the upper hand in a relationship in terms of wealth and power, that could be called a given.

EunAh took a moment to think about it. She muttered to herself with a serious expression on her face.

“Now that I think about it... you’re right. This is all for the sake of paying him back, after all...”

Suhyun found herself becoming more and more entertained by the situation as EunAh began agreeing with her.

“So the person in question is Shin Yusung, yes?”

“Wh-what if it is?!” was EunAh’s harsh response.

But SuHyun was quite experienced in such matters at her 26 years of age. It was child’s play for her to deal with EunAh.

“Oh, nothing. I just thought I could be of help to you, Miss... I have quite a bit more expertise in this area than one would expect.”

“In what?”

“...Dealing with people,” replied SuHyun, giving the younger girl a subtle smile to show her carefree manner.

EunAh’s interest was officially piqued. She let SuHyun sit next to her on the sofa.

“That so? Okay, then. Come over here.”

And so the two women ended up sitting side by side. EunAh showed SuHyun the message that she had written up.

[KimSilverA: Hey, come to the rooftop on Monday.]

TL/N: ‘Eun’ can be read as ‘silver’ in Korean.

SuHyun was at a loss for words at what she had just read.

“M-miss? This is a bit... it reads like a challenge letter, don’t you think so? Try writing it so that it’s easier for him to infer what the meeting is about!”

EunAh fretted a bit more over the message, heeding SuHyun’s advice. She edited the message.

[KimSilverA: Come to the rooftop on Monday. Let’s talk. I have something to say to you.]

It was a marginal improvement over the first one.

“Okay! And Miss, if you just make the contents a bit softer around the edges...!”

SuHyun was wholly invested in helping EunAh.

“More soft? Isn’t that... I mean, wouldn’t that make it too awkward, though?”

SuHyun furiously shook her head at the younger girl’s question. EunAh eventually changed the message once again.

[KimSilverA: Monday, on the rooftop. I want to talk with you. There’s something I need to say.]

An even greater improvement.

But EunAh wasn’t a fan of what she had just written.

“Ugh, but isn’t this sort of... y’know, embarrassing?”

“No, this is fine.”

SuHyun ignored her concerns and sent the message.

Ring!

Now, there was no going back.

EunAh and SuHyun stared at each other. Ten seconds passed by. They couldn’t breathe.

Ring!

EunAh’s Pocket rang once again.

[Shin YuSung: Okay.]

The response was a clear agreement.

“See!”

SuHyun exclaimed, so excited about the message that it almost felt like she was the one receiving it.

EunAh glanced at SuHyun.

“...Whoa,” she said, impressed.

Whatever process they had taken to get there, a meeting time and place had finally been established for EunAh and YuSung.



* * *

A bright, sunny day...

Shin YuSung and his friends were out on a trip to Academy City. Their destination was a brook in the area where the calm sound of flowing water and the earthy scent of plants could wash over them.

Amy was reading articles on the Internet.

“Party Leader-nim, you really are... a god!” she shouted.

“I-is that so?” YuSung smiled bashfully as he asked the question.

SiWoo nodded fervently.

“Really! I couldn’t believe it, even when I read the article! To think you took down a villain... and not just any villain, but a member of the Rebellion!”

It couldn’t be denied that the school had been shaken up by the news of YuSung’s prowess. Even S Class, as elitist as they were, had to acknowledge that the boy had performed quite a feat. Amy moved next to YuSung to give him her analysis of the situation.

“Looking at public opinion on the Internet, I’d say we’re almost at 50-50 between you two! Adela’s quite a tough opponent since she’s so famous, but the villain capture is pulling its weight!”

Amy projected her screen onto a hologram. From what could be seen, the response to the news was mostly positive,

[PhytoncideAndPistachio: FR? Sick]

[DDZ: 🌀 Gaon did us a solid]

[Enre: This student’s gonna show up in the Representative Selections, right? I already wanna cheer for him.]

[CbeforeDafterB: to the fist king’s disciple, a rebellion villain should be a piece of cake!!]

Amy straightened her back.

“As an expert...” she began confidently, “I’ll say you’re all good on votes! All that’s left is your showing at the Representative Selection!”

“Thanks, Amy.”

“Hmhm, I haven’t actually done anything yet, though~? Hehe, still, when I see what you accomplished yesterday, I can’t help but think that backing you was the right choice...”

Amy slyly wriggled her eyebrows, mouth set in a grin. YuSung nodded his head.

“It was... Hm, I’m still worried, though. I don’t know what sort of events are going to take place at the selection.”

Amy wagged her finger back and forth.

“Uh oh, looks like someone doesn’t believe in me! Of course, you’ll get to know what they are! I was going to organize them all~ up and send ‘em to you later!”

“...Huh? How do you know that?” SiWoo shot back. He was stunned by her shocking declaration.

Amy smiled proudly. “I have my ways~ Fufufu!”

‘Amy sure is proficient in this area,’ YuSung thought to himself,

He smiled as well.

Her data was well-organized, and she gave good rundowns of it.

She had even managed to snag key information. Her abilities were past the realm of skillful—they were second to none.

‘I’m really glad I brought her into my party.’

Sumire glanced towards YuSung while he was acknowledging Amy’s skills.

“...S-still, I’m really glad you weren’t hurt anywhere.”

It seemed like she was rather worried about YuSung’s extracurricular activities on the inside. She was happier than anyone else when news of his safe return from his role had reached her.

The reason Sumire had struggled since dawn to pack him a lunch was because she wanted to feed YuSung something delicious after he had gone through so much.

‘I have confidence... in... in my cooking, at least! Since I prepared a lot for this!’

Sumire reassured herself, a rarely-seen determined look on her face. She prepared both Japanese and Korean cuisine for YuSung, including his favorite karaage.

TL/N: Karaage is Japanese fried chicken. It’s boneless and covered in batter.

All that was left was for YuSung to enjoy the meal.

Sumire was waiting for the right moment to unveil her lunch, but while she was dithering, SiWoo suddenly clapped his hands.

“Oh, right! Let me go and get the food I ordered! It’s close by.”

Sumire’s eyes widened at the sudden development.

SiWoo soon came back, both arms loaded with delivery food.

“Ta-dah! Fried chicken is the best for a picnic! It’s a new menu item and super popular right now. Some kids actually got demerits for trying to secretly order this chicken to their dorm rooms. They couldn’t forget the taste!”

The smell of freshly-fried chicken was overpowering.

YuSung had never seen delivery fried chicken before. His interest was

piqued.

“...Is this that delicious?”

He was looking at the chicken with a serious expression on his face.

Sumire hurriedly took out her lunchbox.

“I-I also! Prepared...”

“Whoaa! What’s this!? Did you make this all by yourself!?”

But the one who showed a reaction to her food was Amy.

YuSung’s gaze was still fixed on the delivery food.

“The boneless chicken is really good. YuSung-ah, try one. Dip generously into this sauce and...”

SiWoo fed YuSung a piece of boneless chicken with his chopsticks.

Sumire was getting more and more upset.

“Uu, uuu...”

However, her boxed lunch was going up against delivery fried chicken.

A product of the culmination of techniques developed by a major corporation in service of capitalism. A domination of taste. YuSung, who wasn’t used to eating foods with strong flavors, was captivated by the fried chicken in one bite.

“...This is delicious.”

“Right? I bet you never tasted anything like this on the Martial Spirits’ Mountain. It’s the bomb.”

SiWoo took out even more delivery foods, including pizza. YuSung didn't even have the time to glance in Sumire's direction.

"...I-I also made karaage..." she muttered, trying to appeal to the boy.

"Whoa, handmade karaage!! Me, me, me!"

But again, the one who paid attention was Amy.

YuSung was already completely taken in by the explosion of new flavors happening in his mouth.

"This is really... really delicious."

"Right, right? Kyahaha, I knew you'd like it!"

SiWoo, caught up in the excitement, kept giving YuSung more food. Sumire's shoulders drooped further down as he did so.

A gloomy aura surrounded her. Discouraged, Sumire grabbed a piece of the chicken that YuSung had praised.

The freshly-fried chicken that SiWoo had brought over...

The fried chicken that she had made...

Sumire boldly placed the piece of chicken in her mouth to figure out just what the difference between the two was.

'Uu, uuu... '

And with tear-filled eyes, she realized the truth.

Even if both foods were fried chicken, the delivery chicken had all sorts of provocative flavors incorporated into it. It was a completely different food from Sumire's handmade karaage—she couldn't win against it from the start.

Sumire began mumbling to herself, defeated. "Uu... I-I'll never be able

to beat something like this...”

“Wow! As I thought! This karaage is delicious! Japanese cuisine made by a Japanese person? Good stuff. Whoa, hold on, there’s miso soup, too? This is all amazing!”

Despite all of that, Amy still seemed to like Sumire’s food.

“Th-thank you... for your compliments.”

But Sumire’s appreciative smile had a tinge of sadness to it.



PbF by: traitor/SEN